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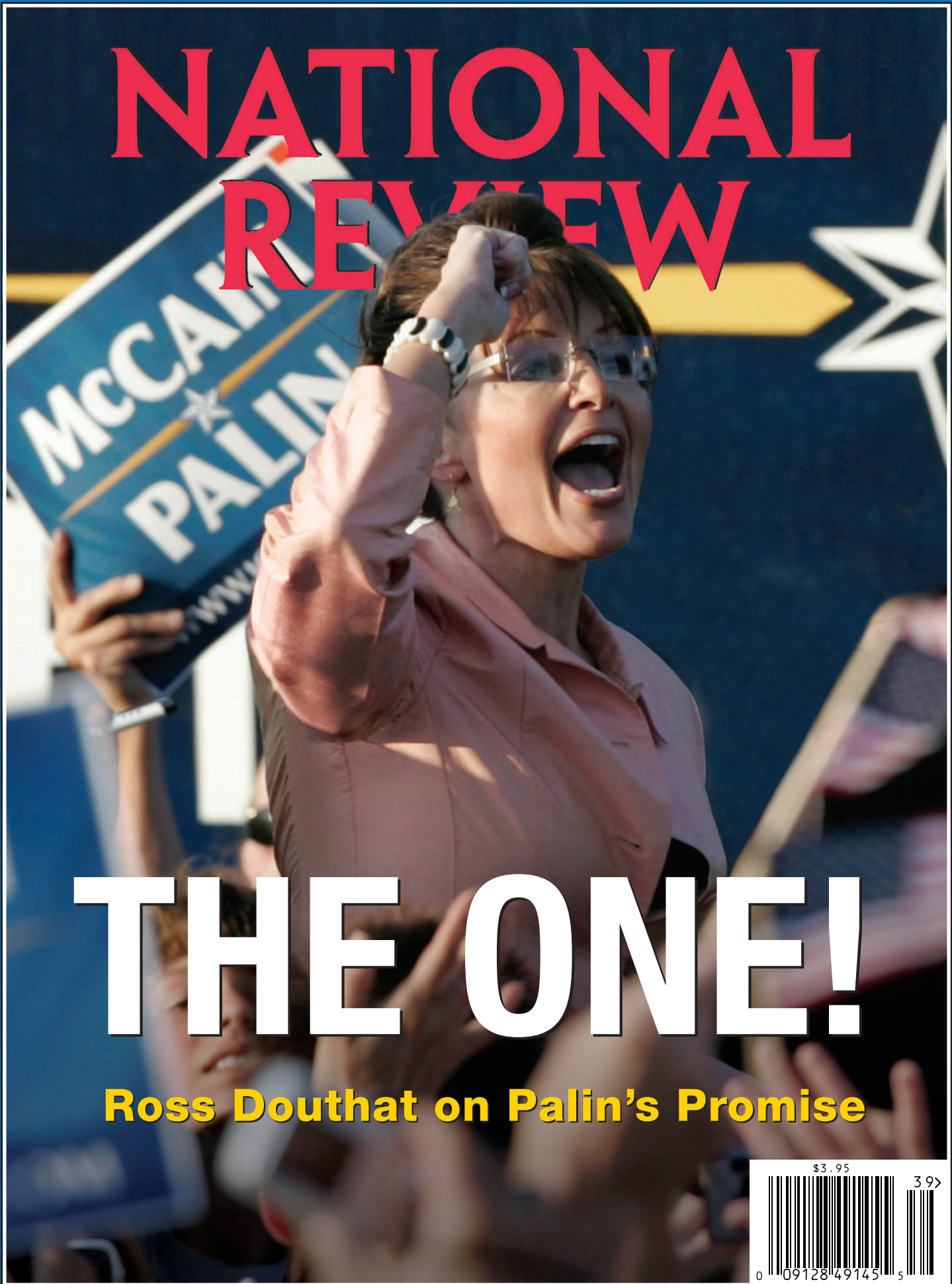

THE ONE!

Ross Douthat on Palin's Promise

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NATIONAL REVIEW

SEPTEMBER 29, 2008 VOL. LX, NO. 18

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■ COVER STORY

Palin Fire

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Within 48 hours of being picked as John McCain's running mate, it was clear that Sarah Palin would become an icon to conservatives, who fell instantly in love for the same identitarian reasons that drove the online Left around the bend. Now the opportunity to become a national icon is within Palin's grasp—should she have the wit and luck to seize it. *By Ross Douthat*

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letters to the editor

JUST COME IN

As a former S.W.A.T. team member and a current homicide detective with the Milwaukee police department, I must take issue with the tone of a paragraph in "The Week" (September 1). The piece addresses the Cheye Calvo incident, in which police raided a Maryland mayor's home looking for drugs, killed his dogs, and restrained him and his mother-in-law. It turned out the man was innocent.

I have personally been involved in the execution of no-knock search warrants, the killing of dogs during those executions, and the investigations of numerous drug-related homicides and officer-involved shootings. Yes, no-knock warrants are issued to avoid the destruction of evidence such as drugs, but they are also issued to protect the officers executing those warrants. In addition, each warrant requires a judge's authorization, and obviously the available evidence satisfied the judge in this case.

Sorry if Calvo and his mother-in-law were "restrained" for "almost two hours." Would you rather have them be comfortable for those two hours, and risk officers' lives and safety? Calvo should be able to understand what the officers did and why they did it.

Municipal police departments do fight a war on the streets of this country daily. This incident should not be considered overkill (to take a word from *Reason*'s Radley Balko), but sound police tactics. As soon as some police administrator starts to second-guess the training and experience of the officers charged with doing these types of investigations, someone will get hurt or killed. Drug investigations are inherently dangerous, and so is the Monday-morning quarterbacking you are doing.

Kent Corbett
Milwaukee, Wis.

THE EDITORS REPLY: We have every sympathy for officers assigned to execute these warrants—they are doing their jobs, and God bless them for it—and in some cases no-knock raids are entirely necessary. But this is not so with the vast majority of drug searches, even assuming (wrongly) that the War on Drugs is a worthwhile endeavor to begin with.

Before employing any law-enforcement tactic, police administrators and judges must weigh the potential benefits against the risks. The element of surprise is the core benefit of a no-knock raid; this prevents the flushing of drugs and, should a shootout occur, can give officers the edge.

The risks, however, are becoming increasingly clear. Raids on innocent persons, more common than one would hope, put law-abiding citizens through a terrifying experience. Homeowners can mistake officers for criminals and fire upon police. Police can mistake household items for weapons and fire upon unarmed homeowners. More common but less tragic are dead pets and innocent couples held for hours.

The benefits exceed the costs when the object is to apprehend violent criminals—but not if it is to keep drugs out of sewers, as appears to have been the case here. Our quarrel here is far less with police officers than it is with legislators.

OMNIPRESENT

I am a new subscriber, and it's upsetting to find Obama on your cover every time I turn around. Seems like three or four times in the last six months.

I'm tired of looking at him. Can't even leave it on the coffee table. Scares visitors!

Bob Shookner
Murphy, N.C.

THE EDITORS REPLY: Is this issue's cover more to your liking?

Letters can be submitted by e-mail to letters@nationalreview.com.

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Is tomorrow's energy right in front of us?

Where on earth could we find enough oil to power more than 60 million cars for 60 years? And enough natural gas to heat 160 million households for 60 years?

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85% of lower 48 OCS acreage is off-limits to oil & natural gas development

In fact, the U.S. government estimates that there are 36 billion barrels of undiscovered technically recoverable oil on federal lands currently closed to development. New technological breakthroughs allow us to tap these resources, even in "ultra deep waters," while protecting fragile marine environments. Recently, oil and natural gas companies employed advanced technologies to discover vast amounts of new oil and natural gas in the Gulf of Mexico – resources beyond our technical reach just a few years ago.

The U.S. Department of Energy predicts America will need 19 percent more energy in 2030 than we used in 2006. Meeting this demand, and ensuring our future energy security, requires developing more energy from more sources, including our own oil and natural gas resources.

Oil and natural gas not only heat our homes and fuel transportation, they also provide the building blocks for everything from medicines to advanced communications equipment. And developing America's untapped energy resources means a stronger economy and more American jobs. That's real economic stimulus – and it would allow increased funding for federal, state and local government budgets.

Oil and natural gas make possible our unequaled quality of life. Ensuring such for future Americans will require policies that permit responsible, respectful access to America's plentiful domestic oil and natural gas resources. These valuable resources are within our reach. Let's work together to realize their potential.

THE *people* OF AMERICA'S OIL AND NATURAL GAS INDUSTRY

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THE WEEK

■ Wasn't Al Capone a community organizer, in a manner of speaking?

■ How does a general responsible for a failed strategy in a major war redeem himself? By talking to Bob Woodward of the *Washington Post*, who is notorious for rewarding his sources with sympathetic treatment. That's why Gen. George Casey, who obviously spent long hours with Woodward, gets an oddly favorable portrayal for defending a losing strategy in Iraq to the bitter end. Woodward writes as though President Bush did something wrong in executing an end-run around Casey and the recalcitrant brass of the Joint Chiefs to find and implement a strategy that might work in Iraq. That strategy was, of course, the surge. The facts make it plain—notwithstanding Woodward's tone—that Bush made a decision of great courage and independence when many at the Pentagon valued getting out of Iraq over winning. Woodward's judgment is askew in other ways. He attributes the increased security in Iraq less to the surge than to a program of targeted assassinations. This was important, but would not have been as effective without the better intelligence that came from an Iraqi population that felt safe enough to give us tips after our troops moved into population centers as part of the surge. There would be no success to argue over if President Bush had not been more determined to win than many of his generals.

■ Barack Obama grounded his Denver acceptance speech in the words that powered his campaign: hope and change. His very nomination is an inspiring mark of change: A man of color leads the party that upheld segregation in the South as recently as 45 years ago. But hope that is not delusive must be grounded on workable proposals for positive change. And there Obama's speech fell short. He promised a raft of new spending—universal health care, the "same kind . . . that members of Congress" get, no less—and pledged to pay for it by plugging loopholes and curbing waste. Since that can't possibly work, he must instead raise taxes; yet he also said he would cut taxes "for working families." He offered to curb Iran and a newly aggressive Russia with "tough, direct diplomacy." Good luck. Barack Obama shot to prominence thanks to his organizational and rhetorical gifts, his race, and a single issue—get out of Iraq—that is increasingly moot. The combination served him well in the spring of 2008; it does not augur well for the next four years.

■ The cast of characters at political conventions is ever changing, except for one family that always appears wherever the Democrats do—the Joads. Their ramshackle jalopy, coated with dust, winds through their speeches, reminding us that it is always evening in America. In years when the economy is booming, it's a struggle to get the old junkheap moving, but the Democrats always manage it; then, their trope is that there are two Americas, one for the heartless rich, the other for the battered sons of toil. Mario Cuomo was the greatest bard of this argument, though John Edwards more recently made it his own until a different issue put him out of commission. When the economy is problematic, as it is now—oil prices sinking but still sky-high; unemployment not sky-high, but rising—then the Joads appear in all their funky glory. Think what the Democrats could do, four years from now, with roaring inflation; one more reason to avoid it.

ROMAN GENN

■ In Denver, Sen. Hillary Clinton blasted Bush for "giving windfall profits to the oil companies." Obama promised to "recruit an army of new teachers and pay them higher salaries." Everything the government allows you to keep, it is giving you, and not a sparrow falls in a school district without the president's direction: The rhetoric suggests an unshaken confidence in federal power. Central planning may be dead as an economic theory, but it lives on in the liberal psyche.

■ Bill Clinton doesn't think very much of Reaganism, Buckleyism, modern conservatism—call it what you like. In

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The Week...

his Denver convention speech, he said that McCain "still embraces the extreme philosophy that has defined his party for more than 25 years." (He is dating our unacceptability from 1980.) Extreme philosophy? Then how can you win five out of seven presidential elections with it (all but Clinton's own)? Clinton also had this to relate: "I will never forget the parents of children with autism and other serious conditions who told me on the campaign trail that they couldn't afford health care and couldn't qualify their children for Medicaid unless they quit work and starved or got a divorce. Are these the family values the Republicans are so proud of?" Yeah, exactly—those are the family values we are so proud of. A class act, that William J. Clinton.

■ The Democrats, in convention assembled, expressed solidarity with America's fighting men and women. They did so because it is politic, and we must do them the credit of assuming that they did so because they believe it is right. Yet the military of their remarks often seemed pathetic and needy, hungry for public services more than for victory and honor. The Democrats believe they have an issue, painting Senator Obama as more supportive of the Veterans Administration than Senator McCain. But aren't they also showing a reluctance to praise a military that is waging a war (however mistaken they find that war) for the job it is doing? Touching all these bases would be a rhetorically complex effort. But isn't it one that civilians ought to make? Troops fight so that we may talk; we should all give thanks.

■ Here's one part of Barack Obama's plan to bring the nation together: His Justice Department will prosecute political opponents. Back in April, Obama said he intended to have "my Justice Department and my attorney general immediately review" any information that might be used to justify an investigation of President Bush or his aides. Now Joe Biden has been caught bloviating at a rally that an Obama administration "will not be stopped from pursuing any criminal offense" committed by Bush officials. The Little Green Footballs blog even turned up an Obama campaign flier on Iraq, promising to "hold accountable any perpetrators of war crimes." This is red meat for the campaign's hard-Left base, but that base is sharply at odds with the majority of Americans, who understand that it is by elections, not indictments, that mature democracies strike the appropriate balance between liberty and security. Criminalizing policy disputes is for tyrannies and banana republics. Biden knows that—which is why he quickly backpedaled when pressed about his comments in a later interview. If Obama intends to wield the presidency's enormous police power against his political opponents, he is not suited to be vested with that power.

■ The Obama campaign began to run an ad saying that "as president, John McCain will make abortion illegal." The prediction is of course false—it would be more accurate to say that McCain says that abortion should be illegal, and would take modest steps toward that goal—but it is within the bounds of modern campaign hyperbole. Obama's tactic may backfire. Democrats have convinced themselves that they need to peel pro-choice voters away from McCain. But can they do that without costing Obama the support of pro-lifers and abortion-ambivalent voters? The more the issue is raised, the greater the likelihood that people will learn that Obama supports partial-birth abortion, taxpayer-funded abortion, and some forms of infanticide. There is a reason that recent Democratic presidential candidates have shied away from the abortion issue.

■ Keith Olbermann and Chris Matthews were demoted from the anchor chairs at MSNBC after a disastrous two weeks of convention coverage. The two men will keep their prime-time talk shows, but from now on NBC News's chief White House correspondent David Gregory will fill in as anchor when the network covers major news events like debates and elections. Olbermann and Matthews's on-air bickering, and their bickering with other MSNBC personalities, turned the network into a national laughingstock when *Daily Show* host Jon Stewart compared it to *Lord of the Flies* and the dysfunctional Lohan family. Left-wing bloggers were quick to criticize MSNBC for caving to conservative complaints about Olbermann and Matthews's cheerleading for Obama, but the real story is that these two were so fevered, even liberals like Stewart realized they had to go.

■ After Sarah Palin was nominated for vice president, and mauled by the establishment press, conservatives had the bright idea of seeing what the *New York Times* had written about Geraldine Ferraro, when she was nominated about 25 years ago. This is what the paper had to say on July 3, 1984: "Where is it written that only senators are qualified to become President? . . . Or where is it written that mere representatives aren't qualified, like Geraldine Ferraro of Queens? . . . Where is it written that governors and mayors, like Dianne Feinstein of San Francisco, are too local, too provincial? . . . Presidential candidates have always chosen their running mates for reasons of practical demography, not idealized democracy. . . . What a splendid system, we say to ourselves, that takes little-known

OLBERMANN: FREDERICK M. BROWN/GETTY; MATTHEWS: ZUMA

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men, tests them in high office and permits them to grow into statesmen. . . . Why shouldn't a little-known woman have the same opportunity to grow?" The *New York Times* takes its opportunity every election.

■ Maysoon Abdelhady told the *Newark Star-Ledger* that she was the perfect delegate to the Democratic convention: "I was recruited because I'm a woman. I'm a Palestinian. I'm a Muslim. I'm disabled. And, because I'm 30 and still not married, people think I'm gay." She went on, "I told all that to the head of the New Jersey delegation, but she said, 'Excellent—you fill every quota we have.'" This lady has a future in Democratic politics.

■ When Tom Tancredo withdrew from the presidential contest last December, he exulted that his campaign was being widely credited with "forcing the issue of immigration to the center of the national stage." How deceitful the hopes of men! The topic of immigration did not figure in the speeches at either party convention, though it regularly polls high on lists of voter concerns. To Democrats, people who speak about immigration with other than unqualified enthusiasm are vile racists. The Republican platform includes some stern language about expediting deportations and denying benefits to illegal residents, but John McCain gives the rather strong impression that he will implement such policies through clenched teeth, if at all. Every segment of our establishment favors open borders. Just don't make them talk about it.

■ Ron Paul and his supporters held a rally in Minneapolis to protest his exclusion from the Republican convention and to

GENE FORTE/CNP/GETTY

Tough Love

SARAH PALIN has brought out the crazies the way leeches are supposed to draw out bad blood. But don't worry, this little feature won't be a tour through the Hieronymus Bosch hell that the left-wing blogosphere has become (though Andrew Sullivan looks more like Edvard Munch's *The Scream*). Instead I'd like to focus on a single bad humor to come out of Palin-palooza.

Reviewing the Alaska governor's convention speech, *Washington Post* style columnist Tom Shales wrote the following: "And a poorly made film about Ronald Reagan, shown to the delegates on Tuesday night, included the outright lie that 'the media hated' Reagan, when just the opposite is closer to the truth." Shales went on: "Reagan's time in the White House was a virtual love affair with the press, whom he charmed as infectiously as he charmed the whole country."

No, really. He wrote that. Really. Stop laughing.

One might be tempted to leave this alone, but that's how urban legends are born. So just a brief tour down memory lane is in order. A typical question, this one from Helen Thomas (talk about Hieronymos Bosch!) in 1982: "How's it possible for you to propose deep cuts in the social programs in view of all this suffering?" That same year, *Newsweek* ran a cover story: "Reagan's America: And the Poor Get Poorer." A study that year found that 85 percent of network news reports on the economy were negative. Bill Moyers announced on CBS that "hunger in America is back"—before Reagan's budget even kicked in. Reagan wrote in his diary that *CBS Evening News* was "an almost total attack on our admin. They are beginning to look like a deliberate campaign."

In 1984, CNN's William Schneider said "Reaganomics is economic elitism. It is the view that hunger in America is merely anecdotal, that the homeless are homeless by choice, and that only the morally unworthy have been hurt by the administration's policies." When Reagan took office, the press suddenly "discovered" homelessness. The epidemic wasn't completely solved until Bill Clinton was sworn in as president, at which instant homeless people were magically transformed into Silicon Valley millionaires.

It is difficult to think of a calamity or hardship suffered by anyone, anywhere, during the Reagan administration that Bryant Gumbel didn't eagerly associate with "Reagan greed." Years later, he would still find innovative ways to blame Reagan for all bad things. The Los Angeles riots were of course Reagan's fault, but there was a silver lining: "We keep looking for some good to come out of this. Maybe it might help in putting race relations back on the front burner after they've been subjugated so long as a result of the Reagan years."

But the press hardly restricted itself to economic issues. *Time* portrayed Reagan as if he were dying of AIDS. The media began from the assumption that he was a warmonger and then started investigating the facts to prove it. Studies of media content show that terms like "Reagan-bashing" and "Reagan hatred" were almost unknown in the 1980s. It was only when Clinton came into office that such "irrational hatred" was a fit subject for media scrutiny. In the 1990s, Clinton haters were called "scary." In the 1980s, Reagan haters were called "journalists."

—JONAH GOLDBERG

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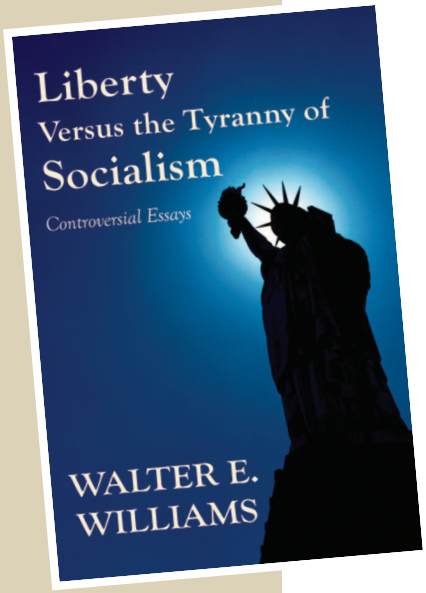

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BY WALTER E. WILLIAMS

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Walter E. Williams is the John M. Olin Distinguished Professor of Economics at George Mason University and a nationally syndicated columnist.

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The Week...

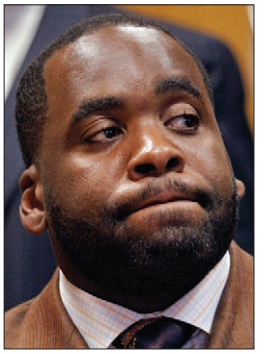
spread the word about his new nonprofit advocacy group, Campaign for Liberty. To the extent that Campaign for Liberty becomes an effective lobby for Paul's causes of limited government and reduced spending, conservatives should welcome it to Washington. Unfortunately, like everything else involving Paul, it comes with kook baggage. Paul attracts a lot of fringe types. The John Birch Society helped fund the rally, and the odious conspiracy theorists known as 9/11 Truthers turned out in force. The crowd evinced a lot of enthusiasm for third-party politics, and many referred to the two major candidates as "McBama." We hope liberty lovers who help Obama win enjoy their higher taxes, socialized medicine, and far-Left Supreme Court appointments.

■ Treasury secretary Hank Paulson announced a plan to save troubled mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac by placing them in a government conservatorship and injecting them with billions of taxpayer dollars. This is a necessary intervention, but it does not go far enough. Paulson's actions fail to resolve the fundamental problem that got us into this mess. As long as Fannie and Freddie exist as hybrid public/private enterprises, investors in the companies will reap the rewards when they succeed and taxpayers will cover the costs when they fail. This structure, a classic moral hazard, encourages heedless growth and excessive risk-taking, and is the reason Fannie and Freddie hover on the brink of insolvency now. The only foundation for real reform is one that puts these bloated behemoths on the road to full privatization and frees the mortgage market of their domination.

■ One step forward, one step back on the abolition of racial preferences. Ward Connerly's effort to outlaw preferences in Arizona by changing the state constitution has been abandoned. Organizers of the Proposition 104 campaign to put an anti-preference initiative on the ballot had collected 334,735 signatures, 100,000 more than required. State and county election officials, however, claimed that a high proportion were invalid. They then restricted access to computer files the campaign needed to counter those claims before a judicial deadline. In Colorado, on the other hand, anti-preference Amendment 46 is firmly on the ballot, and a counter-initiative promoted by a group named Coloradans for Equal Opportunity [*sic*] has been dropped after failing to gather enough signatures. Racial favoritism will die, but not quietly.

■ For one thing, even when colorblind laws are passed, some state colleges will simply ignore them. This is likely the case at UCLA (California was the first state to pass one of Connerly's initiatives), according to political-science professor Tim Groseclose, who recently resigned from the school's admissions committee to protest what he suspects is unlawful behavior. In an 89-page report, Groseclose details the pressure administrators put on the committee to increase black admissions in the wake of unfavorable media coverage of the school's racial balance. He also explains, with transcripts and e-mails, how school officials are playing fast and loose with the data that could prove or disprove his suspicions. Racial preferences seem to go hand in hand with deceit, as corrupt enterprises do.

■ As hurricanes go, Gustav was no Katrina. And as governors go, Jindal is no Blanco—i.e., Louisiana's current governor, Republican Bobby Jindal, did a much better job of preparing his state for calamity than did his predecessor, Democrat Kathleen Blanco. The Associated Press credited Jindal (and New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin) "with overseeing the exodus of 2 million people in one of the biggest and smoothest evacuations in U.S. history." Natural disasters are beyond human control, of course, but public officials can make decisions that either intensify or mitigate their effects. If Gustav was a test, Jindal passed. It remains to be seen whether he'll confront a more severe challenge in the future. Until then, the people of Louisiana can take comfort in his latest performance.



KILPATRICK: BILL PUGLIANO/GETTY

■ Kwame Kilpatrick has one of those distinctive names that are hard to forget—an asset in most lines of work, and especially in politics. On September 4, however, his melting-pot moniker became irrevocably linked to felonious behavior when Kilpatrick, the 38-year-old mayor of Detroit, pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice and announced that he would resign. He admitted to lying in court about an adulterous affair with his chief of staff, but his disgrace goes far beyond a Clintonesque infidelity. The list of Kilpatrick's abuses is both colorful and long. In July, he was accused of assaulting a law-enforcement officer who was trying to serve a subpoena on a relative of his brother-in-law. In August, he went to jail for violating his terms of bond. Detroit has not had much luck in recent decades, but at least it is rid of him.

■ Consider Rep. Charles Rangel, how he lives; he toils not, neither does he report rental income. And yet even Solomon in all his glory was not housed like him. Rangel, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, was recently in the news for having four rent-stabilized apartments in a luxury building in Harlem (ordinary New Yorkers will kill for one). Now it turns out that he has not paid taxes on a beach condo in the Dominican Republic. The condo is in a complex developed, in part, by Theodore Kheel, a New York labor lawyer with whom Rangel has exchanged favors over the years. Is the man who writes the nation's tax laws evading them? Is he getting an offshore tax haven from a crony? Inquiring minds are inquiring; we hope, for his sake, these are the only properties Congressman Rangel owns.

■ Eyes are looking with anxiety at Asif Ali Zardari, the new president of Pakistan. His chance for the presidency came only because he could stand in for his widow, Benazir Bhutto,

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The Week...

after her assassination last December. During her time in office, he suddenly became extremely rich. Corruption charges were brought, and though they were not proven he still had to spend eleven years in prison. Some are saying that the first item on his agenda will be to settle scores. He talks democracy and secularism while Pakistan is seething. Suicide bombers are disrupting the cities. Earlier this month, there was an attempt to murder the prime minister, presumably carried out by jihadis. The tribal areas along the border with Afghanistan are in the grip of the Pakistani Taliban and their Qaeda brothers. If it is to succeed, the War on Terror will have to be brought to these people and places. American Special Forces have just staged the first cross-border ground assault from Afghanistan into Pakistan. Air strikes with drones have also killed Taliban fighters, but some civilians too. President Zardari promises to be an ally of the United States, but he has to convince people that this is the right course. Now we will find out what he's made of.

■ Secretary of state Condoleezza Rice went to Tripoli to break Ramadan fast with Muammar Qaddafi. What a difference an invasion makes. In 2003, taking fright at the fate of Saddam, the Libyan dictator—39 years in power and counting—volunteered to abandon his WMD programs. In the years since then, Libya and the U.S. have made arrangements to compensate victims of Libyan terrorism, and of an American punitive raid in 1986 (unfortunate moral equivalence, but diplomacy often involves swallowing such toads). Libyan reformer Fathi al-Jhami remains in prison, for almost six solid years. Libya is looking for Western investment, and indeed has 3 percent of the world's oil reserves. On a lighter note, Qaddafi seems smitten with Rice, whom he calls "my darling black African woman." Sweet nothings aside, Libya is still not our friend.

■ If there is anything worse than a nuclear-armed North Korea ruled by Kim Jong Il, it is a nuclear-armed North Korea ruled by no one. That's why intelligence reports that the "Dear Leader" may have had a stroke or other serious illness—he has been out of sight for two months and recently skipped an important military parade—raise as much trepidation as hope. If the reports turn out to be true, it would be sadly typical that, even in passing from the scene, Kim has found a way to sow confusion and alarm among his wretched subjects as well as the rest of the world.

■ Former KGB henchman Vladimir Putin used to help persecute Christians, but now the government he commands is courting the favor of the faithful by moving to ban *South Park*, the outrageously obnoxious cartoon satire. Russian authorities claim the program "offends the honor and dignity of Christians and Muslims alike." It's not just Christians and Muslims—is there anybody *South Park* has overlooked offending? To be sure, *South Park* is a trivial matter compared with the invasion of Georgia, throttling of the press, and murdering of critics that have characterized Putin's regime. But much of life is made of small things: After the fall of the Berlin Wall, liberated East Germans reported that they knew the world had changed because oranges suddenly were available year-round, whereas before they had been available only at Christmas, not that anybody was encouraged to notice it was Christmas. It is a shame that Russians who have only briefly tasted the fruits of freedom—the sweet and the bitter alike—should be backsliding so quickly into stagnation. If those KGB bastards kill Kenny, the loss will be small but not insignificant.

■ Our congratulations to King Mswati III of Swaziland on the simultaneous occasions of his own 40th birthday and the 40th anniversary of his nation's independence. There was of course a huge bash to celebrate the event, attended by, according to the *Swazi Observer*, "500,000 happy people." The celebrations featured a 40-gun salute. Not everybody in Swaziland was happy, though. Protesters marched in the streets of the capital, grumbling that while the number 40 is being bandied about, some notice is due to Swaziland's 40 percent rate of HIV infection—the world's highest—and 40 percent unemployment rate. As though to keep these discontents from turning the minds of Swazis away from the monarchical principle, Pres. Robert Mugabe of nearby Zimbabwe was on hand at the festivities to supply a reminder that a republican constitution is no guarantee of good government. The crowd responded to Mugabe's appearance "with loud approval and laughter," reported the *Observer* ambiguously.

■ During the 16th century, the Polish city of Zielona Góra held numerous witch trials, so to celebrate its 900th birthday, locals planned to burn a few witches in effigy. Too sexist, said the federal government, which banned the immolation: "The stakes where women were burned were the result of profound misogyny, discrimination against women, and ignorance. Making people's tragic deaths into a tourist attraction is reprehensible and regrettable." Obviously this official has never been to Salem, Mass. We propose a solution: Let Zielona Góra's city fathers (city parents, that is) get together with the organizers of America's annual Burning Man festival and solve both their problems by swapping "sexism offsets."

The New York Sun

Bush Blames Syria, Iran as War Clouds Scud

TWO ISRAELI SOLDIERS CAPTURED, EIGHT SLAIN AS FIGHTING ENGULFS LEBANON

■ The *New York Sun* was born in 2002. (There was another newspaper of that name, decades ago, but that's another story.) For these six years, the *Sun* has added a lot to New York, and to the country. It provides an alternative to the *Times*. It contains interesting, unusual, and reliable reporting. And it makes a home for conservative views that sometimes have trouble finding a home, and deserve one. In early September, the editor, Seth Lipsky, announced that the paper might have to fold: It is undergoing the usual money crisis. Obviously, we hope the *Sun* can be saved. If not—how rewarding to have had it, even for six years.

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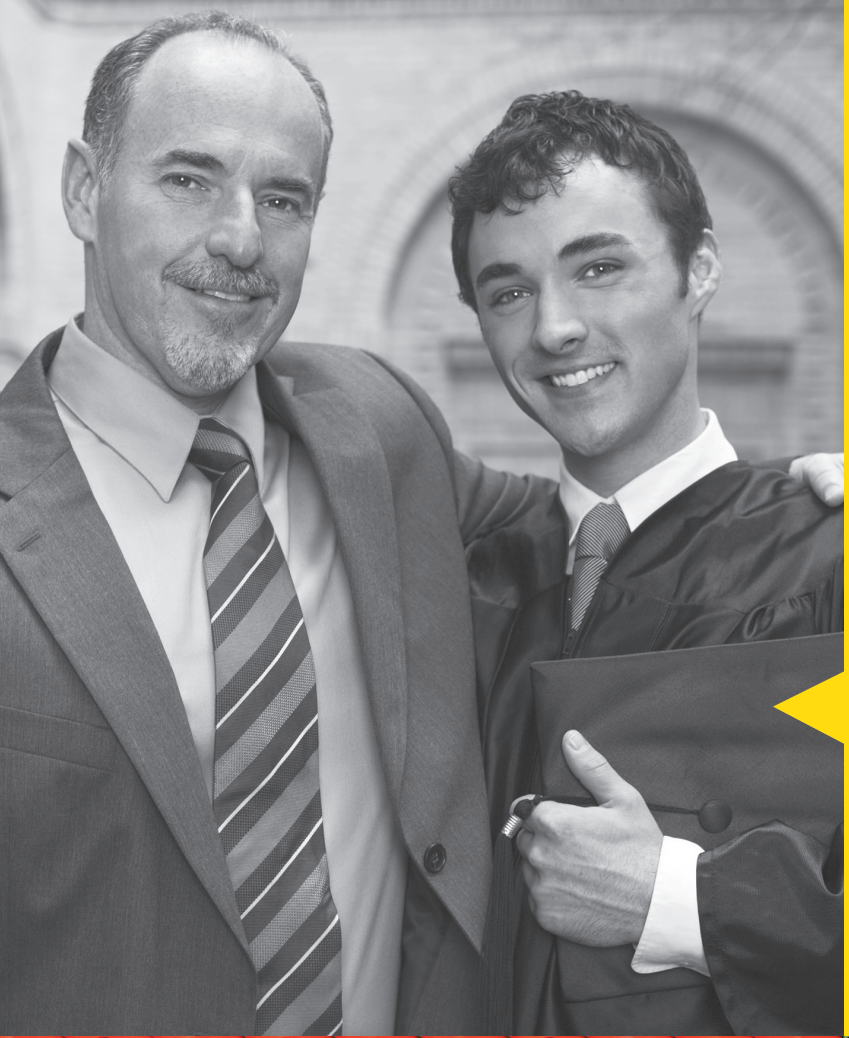

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The Week...

■ At this year's Salzburg Festival—the preeminent arts festival in Europe, and probably in the world—Vanessa Redgrave did a reading. She did so in the company of Jürgen Flimm, the artistic director of the festival. What did they read? "Poems from Guantanamo." These are verses penned by terror detainees held by the U.S. government. (One of the detainees was later released and died in a suicide bombing in Iraq.) Redgrave repeatedly likened Guantanamo to the Soviet Gulag. And she, Flimm, and their ilk regard the detainees as victims. Some may actually be (to be extremely generous about it). But we know there are real victims—of the Taliban, for example, and of Saddam Hussein's regime, and of al-Qaeda. In other words, of people such as the detainees at Guantanamo. Now, say that some of these victims wrote poems. Would they ever be read out at the Salzburg Festival, by a famous actress and the festival director? Some people claim that Europe has gone mad, and on some days, it's hard to disagree.

■ Go through the top 100 finishers in any U.S. men's professional golf tournament and you'll find three or four East Asian names. Do the same with a women's tournament and you'll find about 20. Whatever the reason, this is a problem for the LPGA, which struggles to attract attention and sponsors (while you're at it, compare the prize money) and thinks the overabundance of foreigners is one factor. That's why it recently announced plans to suspend players who lack basic proficiency in English. Is this yet another case of penalizing Asians for their success? Not really. The pro-am, in which amateurs play a round with a professional as their teammate in return for a charitable donation, is an important part of any tournament, as are media interviews. Still, a language requirement seems contrary to the spirit of golf, and the rule can only harm America's image overseas. That's why the LPGA, after an uproar, has rescinded its plans for suspensions. Fines remain an option, however, and civil-rights lawyers are threatening litigation. Here's a better idea: Let the LPGA balance out the publicity pros and cons and then run its own business as it sees fit.

■ In Utah, even the wildlife say no to drugs. When police raided a marijuana farm on Boulder Mountain, they found food containers torn open and scattered, along with bite marks, footprints, and gashes in tree bark. Investigators deduced that the farm had been visited by either a large bear or David Crosby. Assuming the former, we suspect it snapped after being awakened from hibernation one too many times by stoners asking directions to the nearest all-night deli. The Garfield County sheriff commented, "This bear is definitely law-enforcement minded. If I can find this bear, I'm going to deputize him." In other animal/drug news, a heroin-addicted bull elephant from the China–Burma border region has finally kicked the habit. The pachyderm had been fed drug-laced bananas by poachers; when he returned to the feeding place for another fix, the rest of the herd would follow, making them easy prey. After three years of treatment in a Beijing rehab clinic, the patient is finally drug-free. Publishers must be lining up for his recovery memoir.

■ The art world is intrigued by a statue called "Mao Suit," a five-and-a-half-ton steel representation of the dictator's iconic jacket, currently installed on Park Avenue in Manhattan, a choice of location that should merit some kind of Nobel Prize in Irony. Critics have noted that the bottom of the jacket is rather generously cut, suggesting that the chairman was prosperous to the point of being bourgeois. "It suggests that Mao was quite plump," Melissa Chiu, director of the Asia Society's museum, told the *New York Sun*. She added: "Yes, his policies exacted suffering among his people: There is a common saying about Mao being 70 percent right and 30 percent wrong." Seventy percent right? Stéphane Courtois's *Black Book of Communism* estimates that the Maoist project in China killed some 65 million people, about two-thirds of Communism's worldwide toll of 100 million dead. Somewhere, Mao's ghost is wondering, Does this genocide make me look fat?

■ Before there was Disneyland, before there was Great Adventure, before there was Hersheypark, there was Coney Island. Beginning after the Civil War, New Yorkers escaped the stifling summer heat of city tenements by streetcar, rail, ferry, and subway to stroll the boardwalk, lounge on the beach, and sample the rides (first carousel at Coney Island: 1876). After WWII, however, more sophisticated entertainments in more distant places became available. Coney Island began a long decline, whose latest milestone was passed this month with the closing of Astroland, the resort's last real amusement park. "We'll go to Coney / And eat baloney on a roll" crooned Ella Fitzgerald. Well, you can still do that. But while the owners of the Astroland site promise new delights to come, we doubt they will be able to recapture the cheesy charm of the old Coney.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The next issue of NATIONAL REVIEW will appear on Oct. 3.

REDGRAVE: GAVIN BARKER ASSOCIATE

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REBUILD AFTER METH

The headlines about methamphetamine—meth—have been grim. This highly addictive drug leaves a path of destruction that hurts families and entire communities. Users suffer severe health consequences; children are often neglected; and communities face dangerous crime and overburdened law enforcement.

Are we making strides in the fight against meth? Absolutely. From first responders to substance abuse professionals, those who work on the frontlines to combat meth recognize the progress.

- ***Meth use among youth and young adults has declined significantly since 2002.***[1]
- ***More meth users are seeking help. Meth treatment admissions have more than tripled in the past decade.***[2]
- ***And law enforcement officials are finding fewer and fewer domestic meth labs—meth lab seizures in the U.S. have decreased dramatically since 2004.***[3]

There is still work to be done, however — from eradicating meth production and distribution to helping those battling addiction. Consider Teresa. She is a mother, Girl Scout volunteer, and website developer. Her life took a sharp turn when she started using meth to lose weight. Her story went from bad to worse as she abandoned her family, including her 4-year-old daughter, for nearly a year in the search for her next high. She eventually entered a treatment program and made a commitment to conquer her addiction. Today, she is drug-free and a leader in anti-meth efforts in her community. There are thousands of people like Teresa out there, showing individuals and communities what they need to know.

- ***Treatment is available, and it works.***
- ***Drug addiction treatment is cost-effective—for every $1 invested in drug treatment programs, there is a $12 savings in crime and health care costs.***[4]

Each year, nearly 150,000 people are admitted to treatment for methamphetamine.[5] And outcomes for meth users entering treatment are comparable to those for users of other similar drugs.[6] Find out about substance abuse treatment, and support meth treatment in your community.

Learn more at methresources.gov or call 1-800-662-HELP.

American Society of Addiction Medicine
Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)
National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers
NAADAC, Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association of Counties
National Association of Social Workers
National Conference of State Legislatures
National Drug Enforcement Officers Association
National Narcotics Officers' Association Coalition
The Partnership for a Drug-Free America
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
State Associations of Addiction Services

[1]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2002-2006, Table 8.40B.
[2]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) 2007, Table 1b.
[3]DOJ, National Drug Intelligence Center, National Methamphetamine Threat Assessment 2008, December 2007.
[4]National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide," 2000.
[5]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) 2007, Table 1a.
[6]National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide," 2000.

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2008

Bringing the Fight

Sen. John McCain spent the summer skillfully raising Americans' doubts about his colleague Barack Obama's fitness for the presidency. McCain went into the Republican convention leading on the question of who had the right experience for the job. The Democrat's convention bump had given Obama a lead in the high single digits, and that lead could be expected to fade. McCain was doing remarkably well considering the low popularity of his party.

But he rightly concluded that he was on track to a narrow defeat, and made a series of sharp turns. With voters willing to take a chance on something new, McCain's credentials alone were not going to win him the presidency. Moreover, he would be unable to govern if he did win as merely a steady hand: He would be plenty experienced, with nowhere to go.

So he began to emphasize, particularly in his convention speech, that he would fight for the middle class. He reminded voters that he has long been a reformer. And he picked a vice-presidential nominee, Alaska governor Sarah Palin, who reinforced that image.

McCain's convention speech was not a policy manifesto, and the other speakers did not fill the gap. But McCain is halfway to having a compelling middle-class agenda. His support for greater energy production is popular. His health-care plan, which emphasizes making health insurance affordable, is potentially popular, should he devote greater effort to publicizing it. His tax plan is solidly pro-growth and lacks only a large middle-class tax cut to give it the balance that previous successful Republican economic platforms have had.

The Democratic convention pictured Americans as hapless victims in need of government rescue. But most Americans do not see things that way. They are not about to lose their jobs or even much worried about the prospect. What concerns them most is the rising cost of living. If McCain stands for cheap energy, affordable health care, and fatter pocketbooks, he can cut into Obama's edge on economics—and maybe deliver the middle class from its would-be helpers.

2008 II

Palin and Her Enemies

McCain's announcement that Sarah Palin would be his running mate delighted conservatives. A conservative female governor from outside Washington, she excited the electorate without alienating any of the Right's factions. But some people, conservatives as well as liberals, asked legitimate questions about her familiarity with national policy issues. We are not sure that Governor Palin would be "ready on Day One" to be president—but it is exceedingly unlikely that she would have to be. We are not sure about Obama, either, and that question is a more pressing one.

Feminists, meanwhile, immediately started to make the point that her views matter more than her sex. We agree: But then, we have not been talking about the "glass ceiling" in the White House.

Debate on these questions was quickly submerged beneath an avalanche of liberal/media sludge. Mainstream media outlets and respectable liberal opinion journals joined with the tabloids. One blogger for *The Atlantic* sent reporters on a wild-goose chase to prove that Governor Palin is not really the mother of her son Trig. The *New York Times* ran three front-page stories—and on the same day—about the pregnancy of her unwed daughter. CNN used that pregnancy as the occasion for a story about sex education. Columnist Richard Cohen compared Palin to Caligula's horse. *Slate*, which is owned by the *Washington Post*, ran a story referring to Palin's "wreck of a home life," and held a reader contest to name her daughter's baby. When people took turns watching Trig during the governor's convention speech, multiple reporters said he was being "passed around" like a prop. *The New Republic*'s website ran its owner Martin Peretz's opinion of Palin's looks: "pretty like a cosmetic saleswoman at Macy's."

We are not sure that Governor Palin would be 'ready on Day One' to be president—but it is exceedingly unlikely that she would have to be. We are not sure about Obama, either, and that question is a more pressing one.

Reporters spent the first days of the Republican convention speculating about whether Palin had been properly "vetted"—never mind that they never revealed what scandalous information the McCain campaign had supposedly missed. Even more absurdly, they asked whether Palin would be dropped from the ticket. They repeatedly erred in their stories about Palin: claiming falsely that she opposes contraception, that she belonged to the Alaska Independence party, and that she slashed funding for programs for pregnant teens. (Forget vetters; where are the editors?)

This abuse of Governor Palin led, justifiably, to an enraged reaction from Republicans. That reaction had its own excesses: Some Republicans dismissed anyone who expressed concerns about Palin's experience, and not just the unpretty likes of Peretz, as "sexist." The hysteria and even anger that greeted Palin had less to do with sexism or even "elitism" than simple snobbery, along with horror at the sudden prominence of a pro-life woman. (Since *Roe*, we have not even had a pro-life first lady.)

Palin needs to prove herself in press conferences and a debate between now and Election Day, but so far she has been a model of grace under fire. Her cultured despisers should take a break from denouncing the alleged provincialism, bitterness, and status anxiety of rural America and take a look in their mirrors.

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Did the Red Baron Hate This Watch?

We turned to World War I aviation history for a timepiece that truly captures the thrill of the cockpit.

We can't really speak for the top German air ace of World War I, but it's likely he wasn't crazy about chronographs. For the British, French and Yanks who fought ferociously in the skies over Europe, new multi-function wristwatches proved invaluable. These stopwatches helped time complicated maneuvers like barrel rolls in their Sopwith Camel bi-planes. During dog-fights in the smoke and flak-filled skies, any advantage was welcome. Stauer honors the early chronographs with a historic masterpiece, the ***Flyboy 1916*** timepiece.

Honoring the "Millionaire Unit." The air during the Great War was filled with heroes, but one group of flyboys in particular caught our attention. In 1916, a group of students from Yale University, driven by patriotic sentiment and dare-devil attitude, formed their own "Air Force" to get airborne for the Allied powers. Using their well connected families' resources, these Bulldogs purchased their own planes and hired flight instructors. These Elis were from well known American families: Taft, Morgan, Roosevelt, Harriman, and Baruch. The press dubbed them "The Millionaire Unit," but years of distinguished service proved that their commitment was no joke.

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■ 2008 ■

A Bad Dream

And one we've had before

JONAH GOLDBERG

As the presidential race has been accelerating beyond the limits of Einsteinian physics, it's little wonder substantive commentary about Barack Obama's acceptance speech at the Democratic convention was so scarce. Of course, there was ample instant-punditry about the "spectacle" at Denver's Invesco Field—the Greek columns, the adoring throng of 80,000, and the historical poignancy of the speech's being given on the anniversary of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. But the next day John McCain picked Sarah Palin as his running mate; three days after that, the GOP convention commenced. Now Obama's address seems like it was a century ago.

And that's fitting. Because rather than a bold and visionary statement about the future—what some might expect from "The One"—the core theme of the speech was in fact very, very old.

Truth be told, most of it was merely dated. The Kerry-like and Gore-esque laundry list of programs and giveaways was standard Democratic fare. Indeed, as the *Dallas Morning News*'s Rod Dreher noted, whole passages were indistinguishable from similar speeches by Gore and Kerry in 2000 and 2004. This makes sense, because Barack Obama desperately wants to be indistinguishable from Gore and Kerry, because the pollsters say if he can convince voters he's a generic Democrat, he'll win. So, once again the Democratic nominee promises to be Santa Claus, bringing to mind Mencken's famous quip about Harry Truman's 1948 campaign: "If there had been any formidable body of cannibals in the country, he would have promised to provide them with free missionaries fattened at the taxpayers' expense."

But beneath the fresh coat of rhetorical paint on the calcified clichés of contemporary liberalism there is a deeper vision to Obama's speech, one that is both consistent with his rhetoric from the earliest days of his campaign and career and also perfectly in line with the ambitions of progressivism since its founding.

For generations politicians of both parties spoke about the "American dream," a phrase that, though ill-defined, usually conjures up some conception of the individual pursuit of happiness. To own your own home, care for your family, succeed in what you set out to do: This, for most people, is what the American dream is about. Whatever the American dream means to most Americans, it is emphatically not a collectivist concept (though the phrase was reportedly coined by the progressive historian James Truslow Adams, who did see it as a more collective ideal). For most of us, there is no one American dream, because my dream is different from your dream. Victory can be pursued by a group; happiness must be found alone.

The American dream, as most of us understand it, stands in marked contrast to the idea of the American promise, the central theme of Obama's speech and even of the Democratic convention as a whole. In 1909, *New Republic* founder Herbert Croly published his book *The Promise of American Life*, widely considered the bible of the progressive movement (a movement Obama has explicitly declared the precursor of his own campaign's mission). Felix Frankfurter dubbed the book "the most powerful single contribution to progressive thinking."

Unlike Obama, Croly did not have a wandering childhood abroad, but he was something of an internal exile. And he shared Obama's sense of being an outsider in America. Historian Eric Goldman wrote that Croly's fringe-intellectual, European-style upbringing led him to write about even his fellow progressives the "way foreign ambassadors talk about American baseball games." Something similar might be said of the man who mused that people who didn't vote for him were simply bitterly clinging to their sky god and boomsticks.

Obama and Croly also share a similar view of the intersection of religion and politics: They don't believe there is one, because the two things are identical. Croly embraced Christianity in college and later fell for Eastern spiritualism, but he never failed to see politics as an extension of religious messianism; Obama talks of using government to create a kingdom of heaven on earth. The black-liberation theology of Obama's former church explicitly merges black-power politics and theological teaching to the point that one cannot

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discern one from the other. In *The Promise of American Life*, Croly yearned for a "national reformer . . . in the guise of St. Michael" and an "imitator of Christ" who would crush laissez-faire capitalism and cruel individualism. (Indeed, he wrote, an "individual has no meaning apart from the society in which his individuality has been formed.")

Croly is often described by his progressive fans as a heroic small-D democrat. But this is pure spin: Croly was a centralizer who despised the Jeffersonian tradition. He worshipped Lincoln for his centralizing power-politics and favored keeping big business as big as possible so as to make it a more effective tool of government. Indeed, what confuses many students of history is that he was a national-socialist (note the lower case, please) who used the word "democracy" as a rough substitute for what most would call socialism. "For better or worse," Croly proclaimed, "democracy cannot be disentangled from an aspiration toward human perfectibility." Even a cursory review of the *Federalist Papers* will reveal this wasn't the Founders' understanding of democracy. For Croly, the "promise" of America was the aim of replacing the American conception of "government" by the people with the European ideal of "the State" as the highest expression of "the people's" Rousseauian general will. He agreed wholeheartedly with Woodrow Wilson's and John Dewey's visions of a progressive America where every individual, in Wilson's words, "marr[ied] his interests to the State." Such a new America would come about through a national politico-religious "reconstruction."

Since the mid-1990s, Herbert Croly has enjoyed a fitful revival, particularly among self-described progressives desperate to find an intellectual lineage to the progressive era. Both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have explicitly claimed to be the incarnations of the original progressive spirit, though, out of either wisdom or ignorance, they refrain from spelling out what specific progressive ideas they find common cause with. (Presumably it wasn't the war-mongering, eugenics, racism, or disdain for civil liberties.)

Obama's acceptance speech in Denver was not expressly Crolyite, but those familiar with Croly's work can't help but hear the echoes. One can imagine that his real desire—if he hadn't been forced to make so much of it conventional boilerplate—was to offer a progressive Gettysburg Address, transforming the American dream into a strictly statist concept.

Obama's sleight of hand begins in the first paragraph. After he dispenses with the thank-yous, he says: "Four years ago, I stood before you and told you my story—of the brief union between a young man from Kenya and a young woman from Kansas who weren't well-off or well-known, but shared a belief that in America, their son could achieve whatever he put his mind to."

He continues in the next paragraph: "It is that promise that has always set this country apart—that through hard work and sacrifice, each of us can pursue our individual dreams but still come together as one American family, to ensure that the next generation can pursue their dreams as well. That's why I stand here tonight. Because for 232 years, at each moment when that promise was in jeopardy, ordinary men and women—students and soldiers, farmers and teachers, nurses and janitors—found the courage to keep it alive."

So far, it sounds as if Obama is simply going to use "American promise" as a stand-in for "American dream." After all, his version of the son-of-an-immigrant success story fits nicely within the idea of the American dream. But after the opening reference to "individual dreams," Obama's speech becomes a Deweyan alchemy spell to transmogrify individual liberty into collective action. The promise of America, for Obama, is the hope that one day we will live in a country where we all work together, where "one person's struggle is all of our struggles" (as he put it in his introductory video). The American promise, Obama insists, is "the idea that we are responsible for ourselves, but that we also rise or fall as one nation; the fundamental belief that I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper. That's the promise we need to keep. . . . Individual responsibility and mutual responsibility—that's the essence of America's promise."

It sounds benign, even noble, except for the central deceit in Obama's plea. The Biblical injunction to be your brother's keeper—what Obama calls "mutual responsibility"—is not a writ for government activism. You do not fulfill your obligation to look out for your fellow man by paying taxes, never mind by voting to impose them on others. Absent from Obama's rhetoric is any serious acknowledgment that there are countless mediating institutions between the individual and the state. Civil society—churches, schools, voluntary associations, etc.—provides the sinews of the mutual responsibility that exists outside of the sphere of government. But for Obama, as with Croly, it is all either/or: Either you're "on your own" or you're in the good hands of the all-state, and I'm not talking about an insurance company. This is a marked contrast with McCain's speech, which, in short, promised to reform government: Obama promises to reform *America* instead.

Obama does offer some concessions to the role entrepreneurialism plays in American society, but it's clear he sees business as an extension of politics. Businesses, he insists, "should live up to their responsibilities to create American jobs." Job creation is a wonderful thing, but it takes a community organizer's understanding of the private sector to think that it is the businessman's responsibility to create jobs. There are only two kinds of firms that go into business to create jobs: the ones that almost immediately go out of business and the ones that consider bilking taxpayers a noble endeavor.

Obama's disdain for the traditional notion of the American dream as the pursuit of happiness is palpable. "In Washington, they call this the Ownership Society, but what it really means is—you're on your own. Out of work? Tough luck. You're on your own. No health care? The market will fix it. You're on your own. Born into poverty? Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps—even if you don't have boots. You're on your own."

This philosophical myopia informs Obama's entire conception of politics. In his recent interview with Fox's Bill O'Reilly, Obama defended raising taxes on the wealthy on the grounds of "neighborliness": "If I am sitting pretty, and you've got a waitress who is making minimum wage plus tips, and I can afford it if she can't—what's the big deal for me to say, 'I'm going to pay a little bit more.' That is neighborliness." Perhaps that makes sense if you and your neighbors live in Hillary Clinton's village, but

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neighborliness by definition is not compulsory.

Obama's prism, however, isn't the Clintonite village, where everybody's business is everybody's business. Rather, his ideal for social organization is the Movement. "This too," he proclaimed in Denver, "is part of America's promise—the promise of a democracy where we can find the strength and grace to bridge divides and unite in common effort." It's telling how much Sarah Palin's and Rudy Giuliani's barbs at "community organizing" shook the Obama campaign. Hilariously, left-wing blogs shrieked that "Jesus was a community organizer, Pontius Pilate was a governor." Putting theological issues aside, whether or not Jesus could be called a community organizer, what's clear is that Obama isn't *that* kind of a community organizer. The comparison speaks volumes about a campaign that has been desperately trying to tamp down its perceived messianism. Let the record show that Jesus was not running for governor (and, as a colleague quipped, Pilate merely voted an Obama-like "present")—which is why Jesus, unlike Croly and Obama, didn't confuse Caesar's portfolio with God's.

At the end of his Invesco Field address, Obama returns to the speech he seems to have wanted to give. He notes that he's speaking on the 45th anniversary of Martin Luther King's "dream" speech. But it is not King's dream of colorblindness, in which individuals are respected regardless of color, that he invokes—but a different vision altogether. The message of King's speech is, according to Obama, that "in America, our destiny is inextricably linked, that together our dreams can be one." He continues, "'We cannot walk alone,' the preacher cried. 'And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back.' . . . Not with so much work to be done; not with so many children to educate, and so many veterans to care for; not with an economy to fix, and cities to rebuild, and farms to save; not with so many families to protect and so many *lives to mend.* America, we cannot turn back. We cannot walk alone."

Perhaps not. But if we all end up walking toward a single dream, by definition it will not be the American dream, but Obama's. **NR**

■ 2008 II

Hardly

The Democratic nominee is no latter-day Lincoln

ALLEN GUELZO

He is a lawyer from Illinois. He has served in the state legislature, then briefly in Congress, where he has made a name for himself by opposing an unpopular war. He is lanky and eloquent and . . .

So goes the Obama-turns-out-to-be-just-like-Lincoln riff, which we've been hearing so much of lately. Vote for Obama and we'll get Lincoln, say commentators like Ken Burns, who thinks Obama's "moral courage" and "unironic posture" make him Lincolnesque.

The same message emanates from Tony Kushner, whom Steven Spielberg has tagged to write the screenplay for his forthcoming Lincoln movie. "The Obama-Lincoln links are real," Kushner told *New York* magazine's Tim Murphy. Both demonstrate a genius for "reducing discord and inspiring people to find common ground." And Al Gore, speaking to the Democratic National Convention, also saw in Obama a new Lincoln, "a clear thinker and great orator" who would shoulder aside the "50-year lease on the Republican party" held by "big oil and coal."

But the most nuanced celebration of the Obama-Lincoln connection came in the May 1 *New York Review of Books*, where Garry Wills, author of the Pulitzer Prize–winning *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, drew a detailed parallel between the ways Lincoln and Obama disarmed their conservative critics. "Their crippling connection with extremists" unfairly tarred both men. Lincoln had the abolitionist John Brown, who led the Pottawatomie Massacre and the Harpers Ferry raid; Obama has Jeremiah Wright.

Mr. Guelzo is the Henry R. Luce Professor of the Civil War Era at Gettysburg College and the author of *Lincoln and Douglas: The Debates That Defined America.*

In 1859, "extremists" raised "a general panic over John Brown" and applied "the politics of fear" to paint Lincoln as the real extremist. So did modern-day "extremists" over Jeremiah Wright, laying an updated coating of the politics of fear on Barack Obama. Lincoln shrewdly distanced himself from Brown's actions without condemning his cause. And Obama, likewise, "denounced the specific statements of Wright that were indefensible" without letting go of "the concern for the community that Wright had shown." Obama may not have been quite up to the rhetorical bar of "the resplendent Lincoln," Wills admitted, but "what is of lasting interest is their similar strategy for meeting the charge of extremism."

No wonder Ken Burns marveled, as the *Washington Post* paraphrased, that "history may be repeating itself" (and not, we presume, just in syndication). What American, after all, would *not* vote for Abraham Lincoln if he had the chance? "That's the logic that underlies the Obama campaign," concluded Berkeley blogger Bob Burnett. Vote for Obama and you will "elect Lincoln; he'll bring us together."

But is it true?

What is odd about the Obama-Lincoln connection is that the first person to deny it has been Barack Obama. In a piece he wrote in 2005 for a special Lincoln-themed issue of *Time* magazine, Obama looked "in Lincoln's eyes," and what he saw there did not suit him very well. "As I look at his picture," Obama wrote, "I cannot swallow whole the view of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator. As a law professor and civil rights lawyer and as an African American, I am fully aware of his limited views on race. Anyone who actually reads the Emancipation Proclamation knows it was more a military document than a clarion call for justice. Scholars tell us too that Lincoln wasn't immune from political considerations and that his temperament could be indecisive and morose."

Although Obama hailed "Lincoln's rise from poverty, his ultimate mastery of language and law, his capacity to overcome personal loss and remain determined in the face of repeated defeat" as matters that reminded him "of my own struggles," these are characteristics that can be found in William McKinley as easily as in Lin-

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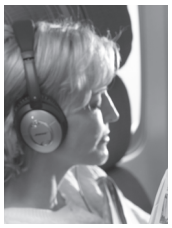

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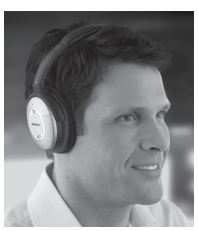

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coln. On the points that, so to speak, make Lincoln *Lincoln*—emancipation, the preservation of the Union—Obama found little that looked like Obama.

Obama's instincts were not misplaced. Yes, Lincoln was born in poverty and transformed himself by his own energies. But he never attended a prep school like Obama's Punahou, nor Columbia University, nor Harvard Law School. Nor was Lincoln's grandmother (whom he never knew) a bank vice president, as was Madelyn Dunham.

Yes, Lincoln struggled to educate himself and make a career out of politics, and like Obama he was furious at the ease with which the privileged were handed life on a silver platter. But Lincoln's solution was to encourage entrepreneurship. "I want every man to have the chance—and I believe a black man is entitled to it—in which he can better his condition—when he may look forward and hope to be a hired laborer this year and the next, work for himself afterward, and finally to hire men to work for him! That is the true system." Lincoln's models were Henry Clay (and Clay's "American System" of economic development) and John Stuart Mill, and he frankly endorsed leaving "each man free to acquire property as fast as he can." Lincoln did "not propose any war upon capital"; what he proposed was to "allow the humblest man an equal chance to get rich with everybody else." Obama's models were Malcolm X and Saul Alinsky, and his ultimate goal is not to ensure equal opportunity, but "to ensure fairness."

Yes, Lincoln was a state legislator and lawyer from Illinois, like Obama. But Lincoln quickly became the floor leader for his party and moved to passage the most sweeping economic initiatives ever undertaken in Illinois; Obama led nothing and voted "present" nearly 130 times. Obama's career as a lawyer lasted only two years, from 1993 (when he joined the firm of Davis, Miner, Barnhill & Galland) to 1995 (when he ran for the state senate). Lincoln's law practice stretched over 23 years and over 5,600 cases, and was heavily focused on the protection of property rights, not "community organization." He acted as counsel and lobbyist for the Illinois Central Railroad in the 1850s, representing it at least 50 times between 1853 and 1859 and earning a reputation for honesty. Obama's brief association with DMB&G is probably best known today because of the firm's most notorious client, Tony Rezko.

Yes, critics tagged Lincoln with the dark badge of John Brown, and yes, Lincoln neatly sidestepped the issue while remaining focused on opposing the spread of slavery. But unlike Obama and Rezko, Lincoln had never met Brown, had not sat with Brown in church for 20 years, and had not allowed Brown to baptize his children. Nor did Lincoln have political ties to Brown comparable to Obama's ties to Weather Underground terrorist Bill Ayers.

Lincoln condemned Brown as the sort of "enthusiast" who "broods over the oppression of a people till he fancies himself commissioned by Heaven to liberate them." Even if Brown "agreed with us in thinking slavery wrong," Lincoln also said, "that cannot excuse violence, bloodshed, and treason." John Brown was not nearly the problem for Lincoln that Jeremiah Wright and Bill Ayers will prove to be for Barack Obama.

I will happily admit that there *are* resemblances between Barack Obama and Abraham Lincoln. But then, I can claim to resemble Lincoln, too—in that I have two ears, a nose, and so forth. This is, of course, superficial—just as most historical resemblances turn out to be superficial.

Comparing Obama to Lincoln would have meaning only if Obama were facing a specific national crisis—one that had built for 30 years, been galvanized by regional political blocs, and threatened to result in war, the breakup of the Union, and violent assaults on federal military installations.

But if by "resemblance" we mean to speak about shared ideas, then it is hard to think of two American presidential candidates more dissimilar to each other than Obama and Lincoln. "The legitimate object of government," said Lincoln, is only "to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done but cannot do at all, or cannot so well do, for themselves. . . . In all that the people can individually do as well for themselves, government ought not to interfere."

When that becomes Obama's philosophy, we can start talking about the second coming of Abraham Lincoln. **NR**

■ 2008 III

Organization Man

Team McCain forces Obama to defend his résumé

BYRON YORK

"I GUESS a small-town mayor is sort of like a community organizer, except that you have actual responsibilities."

When Sarah Palin, standing before a wildly enthusiastic crowd at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, delivered that put-down of Barack Obama's much-touted background, Mike Kruglik was at home in Chicago, watching TV and getting mad.

"It was an insult to the thousands of people who are involved in communities across the country," says Kruglik, who was a community organizer with Obama back in the 1980s. "It made me angry that for a political purpose, somebody like Palin would insult these good people."

Palin's jab struck a nerve with the Obama campaign, too. Just hours after the speech, Obama campaign manager David Plouffe sent an e-mail to contributors, complaining that Palin had "specifically mocked Barack's experience as a community organizer." In doing so, Plouffe said, Palin had offended not only Obama but the movement that brought civil rights, women's suffrage, and the 40-hour work week. "Let's clarify something for them right now," Plouffe wrote. "Community organizing is how ordinary people respond to out-of-touch politicians and their failed policies."

Some of Obama's allies in the press were even more upset. MSNBC's Chris Matthews suggested that the term "community organizer," as Republicans used it, was racist, wondering whether it had become "the new 'welfare queen.'" A political analyst for *The Atlantic* said there was an ongoing "debate about whether the term has racial connotations."

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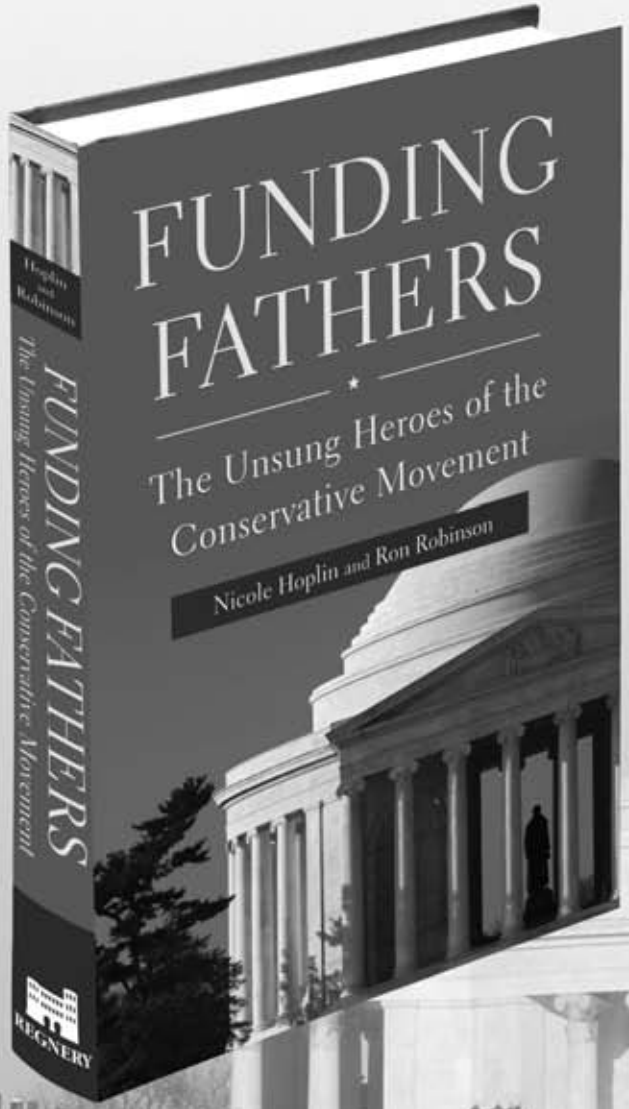
Meet the Unsung Heroes Behind the Conservative Movement



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By using one phrase, in the course of a single evening, Republicans had put Team Obama on the defensive about what had previously been one of Barack Obama's most treasured and oft-repeated biographical points. It made GOP strategists very, very happy.

But they weren't happy just because they had carried out a deft and effective attack on the opposition. They were happy because they had gotten a measure of revenge for what they regarded as an early and unwarranted hit against Palin. On August 29, just minutes after McCain named Palin as his running mate, the Obama campaign put out a statement that began, "Today, John McCain put the former mayor of a town of 9,000 with zero foreign policy experience a heartbeat away from the presidency." The McCain forces were unhappy not so much with what the Obama campaign had said as with when they said it—it was a rough start; no hello, how-ya-doin', no nothing.

Later that day, Obama and Joe Biden made a much softer statement welcoming Palin to the race. But the McCain campaign still resented that first attack. "The tone was incredibly dismissive," says one McCain aide. "It was their first and loudest statement in response to Governor Palin's selection, and it was disrespectful and inappropriate." So Team McCain hit back, in the form of Palin's "small-town mayor" remark. "It was a direct response," the aide says.

But the remark did more than just hit back. Palin's comments focused attention on the definition of "community organizing" and on Obama's qualifications to be commander-in-chief. To Democrats, community organizing is a much-admired calling. To Republicans, it's lefty rabble-rousing agitation. And to independents, it's—well, they're not sure what it is.

The profession springs from the work of the Chicago activist Saul Alinsky (1909–1972), author of the community organizer's bible, *Rules for Radicals*. Alinsky began by organizing workers in Chicago's stockyards. His method was to get people mad; in *Rules*, he defined an organizer as "an abrasive agent to rub raw the resentments of the people of the community; to fan latent hostilities of many of the people to the point of overt expressions." At that point, they all march on city hall and demand something. Community organizers have been following Alinsky's guidance for decades.

During his stint as an organizer, Obama succeeded in coaching a group of local residents to pressure the city of Chicago to open a job-placement center on the far South Side. (For the full story, see "The Organizer" in NR's June 30 issue.) Obama also took part in an effort to force the city to remove asbestos from a housing project in the same area. He worked on a lot of other things as well—after-school programs, voter registration, and the like—but after three years he had no great successes to point to. That's why he left; he was frustrated that community organizing didn't seem to lead to much progress.

It remains anyone's guess how Obama's experience as a community organizer has prepared him for the presidency, although Obama has cited it time and again when listing his qualifications. "I can bring this country together," he said in a debate last February. "I have a track record, starting from the days I moved to Chicago as a community organizer."

The Palin speech took aim at that argument. And it hit the target; in the wake of Palin's appearance, Obama seemed to downplay his record a bit. "[Republicans] haven't talked about the fact that I was a civil-rights lawyer," he told reporters the next day. "They haven't talked about the fact that I taught constitutional law. They haven't talked about my work in the state legislature, in the United States Senate. They're talking about the three years of work that I did right out of college, as if I'm making the leap from two or three years out of college into the presidency."

Later, the Obama campaign tried to equate professional, Alinsky-descended organizers like Obama with any sort of community or neighborhood action. Let's say you're a concerned parent who joins the PTA—you're a community organizer. Maybe you live next door to an empty lot and you recruit some neighbors to clean it up—you're a community organizer. And Obama, they argued, is just like you.

Whatever. The important thing for Team McCain was that in the end it was Democrats who were left explaining themselves and the Republicans who had gotten revenge for the "small-town mayor" attack.

But don't expect references to Obama's community organizing to go away completely. It is too much a part of the Obama Narrative for that. Just look at the biographical video that played before Obama's Democratic-convention acceptance speech before 80,000 people at Denver's Invesco Field.

"In Chicago, he would find a calling," the announcer's voice said as the crowd in the darkened stadium watched in rapt attention. "There were factory closings, lost jobs, failing schools, and in the people he met, he would find answers."

What does that mean? Who knows? But it showed just how deeply ingrained the image of Obama the Organizer has become in the minds of his millions of supporters. And they'll never give it up, no matter what Sarah Palin says. **NR**

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Professor Gary W. Gallagher is the author of several books and dozens of scholarly articles, most recently *The Confederate War* (Harvard University Press, 1997). He is the John L. Nau III Professor in the History of the American Civil War at the University of Virginia.

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■ 2008 IV

Chronicles of Absurdity

Alan Colmes and Lindsay Lohan dissect Sarah Palin, parent

JIM GERAGHTY

Are the national media *really* running around asking whether John McCain's running mate, Alaska governor Sarah Palin, is a bad mother? No, they respond: They are only fulfilling their duty, in assessing whether Palin's maternal instincts are sufficient to meet the threshold of maternal excellence long associated with the office of the vice presidency.

Okay, sarcasm off. But it's hard not to be sarcastic when the press offers such a fat target. Even before Palin had made her first appearance as McCain's running mate, CNN's John Roberts asked a female correspondent: "Children with Down syndrome require an awful lot of attention. The role of vice president, it seems to me, would take up an awful lot of her time, and it raises the issue of how much time will she have to dedicate to her newborn child?" (It was left to correspondent Dana Bash to raise the issue of whether a male running mate would be asked the same question.)

On August 29, *The Atlantic*'s Andrew Sullivan felt the need to spotlight a reader's e-mail that shared the charge that "Sarah Palin is a Bad Mother!" And on August 30, Fox News commentator Alan Colmes put up a post on his blog asking, "Did Palin Take Proper Pre-Natal Care?" and noting that "even after the water broke, [she] continued with her activities and then boarded a plane."

Had Colmes consulted something beyond one newspaper article about the birth, he might have learned that preterm premature rupture of the placental membrane (PPROM) complicates 3 percent of all pregnancies, occurs in approximately 150,000 U.S. pregnancies each year, and can occur before labor begins. While there is some risk of infection or compression of the umbilical cord, active labor can, in some cases, be delayed as much as a week. At the time, Palin called her doctor, Cathy Baldwin-Johnson, who—based on the length of time between contractions—determined Palin was not in active labor and okayed her return flight. She gave birth the next day.

Many interpreted Colmes's post as wondering whether the flight contributed to Trig Palin's Down syndrome, and liberal bloggers repeated the charge, because of the inherent plausibility of a Fox News commentator/blogger's making the epic breakthrough in medical research of conclusively linking the cause of Down syndrome to air travel. (A prenatal test months earlier had indicated Trig Palin was likely to have the condition.) Colmes's post mysteriously disappeared for a while shortly after posting, because it was causing "technical issues" for his site; then it was removed for good, because of "vile comments" left in response.

Also on August 30, Bill Weir of ABC News asked McCain aide Mike DuHaime, "Adding to the brutality of a national campaign, the Palin family also has an infant with special needs. What leads you, the senator, and the governor to believe that one won't affect the other in the next couple of months?"

On September 1, Campbell Brown of CNN asked McCain spokesman Tucker Bounds "why [Sarah Palin] would have subjected [Bristol Palin, her pregnant daughter] to this kind of scrutiny by accepting this high-profile position?" Brown's query subtly elided the fact that how much scrutiny this young woman is subjected to is in the hands of people like CNN's Campbell Brown, not Tucker Bounds or Sarah Palin. And if Brown seemed to find that scrutiny so troubling, one might wonder why she made that her second question of the interview.

On September 2, liberal talk-show host Ed Schultz asked Larry King, "What kind of mother is she? Is she prepared to be the vice president? Is she going to be totally focused on the issues?"

The following day, Harry Smith of CBS's *Early Show* asked: "Coming up, the mommy wars. Should a woman with five children run for the nation's second-highest office? We'll hear from all sides of that debate. The question, can a mother of

ROMAN GENN

Mr. Geraghty writes The Campaign Spot for NRO.

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five, including an infant with Down syndrome, be an effective vice president?" During that discussion, *Washington Post* columnist Sally Quinn declared that "a woman with five children, including one with special needs, and a daughter who is a 17-year-old child who is pregnant and about to have a baby, probably has got to rethink her priorities." (The on-screen headlines over at MSNBC—"SOME WORKING MOTHERS WORRY THAT PALIN IS TAKING ON TOO MUCH" and "SOME VOTERS CONCERNED IF PALIN, A MOTHER OF FIVE, HAS TIME TO BE VP"—left little doubt as to the direction in which the liberal media believe those priorities should be rethought.)

On September 4, NBC News anchor Brian Williams asked, "Are [working women with several children] wrong when they express fears or doubts that she should be able to do this, that she should be doing this?" Sally Quinn tried again on September 5: "And I think if you're talking about the commander-in-chief, and that is what she is likely to be given his age and his health, will she put her country first, or will she put her family first?" (Reality check: Has anyone ever asked whether Obama, Biden, Bill or Hillary Clinton, George W. Bush, or indeed *any* other candidate for high office with children, would put family or country first?)

Last and also least, noted parenting expert and actress/reckless driver/basket case Lindsay Lohan felt compelled to weigh in, declaring that "I am concerned with the fact that Sarah Palin brought the attention to her daughter's pregnancy, rather than all world issues and what she believes she could possibly do to change them—if elected."

On the last night of the Republican convention, MSNBC's Keith Olbermann reacted in outrage to a comment by Hawaii governor Linda Lingle on this issue. Said Olbermann: "I'd love the governor or anybody else repeating those talking points to give us the names of those news organizations that have actually questioned whether or not mothers have a right to sit in office. But we haven't heard that list yet." His colleague Chris Matthews agreed: "I sit here waiting for that list of major news organizations who have questioned her motherhood or her right to become vice president, given her motherhood. I don't think it has ever happened."

Glad to oblige. **NR**

■ 2008 V

McCain, Meet Macomb

A bellwether Michigan county shows what he must do

JOHN J. MILLER

On September 5, the day after John McCain accepted the Republican presidential nomination, he and Sarah Palin headed to a rally in Sterling Heights, Mich. "A little straight talk here," said McCain. "I need Michigan to win."

That's not exactly true. President Bush proved that a Republican can lose the state and still prevail. If McCain and Palin do manage to flip Michigan from blue to red, however, they'll probably guarantee themselves a victory in November. The location of their appearance—the Freedom Hill Amphitheatre in Macomb County—was well chosen. "This place is a bellwether," says Harry Veryser, a longtime conservative activist in the area. "The way Macomb County goes, so goes the state."

Macomb County is more than just another battleground in the Midwest—it's the iconic home of Reagan Democrats.

The locals have a history of picking winners on Election Day. Yet Macomb County is more than just another battleground in the Midwest—it's the iconic home of Reagan Democrats, the breed of voter whose defection to the GOP in the 1970s and 1980s signaled the end of liberalism's high tide and the emergence of conservatism as a national force.

Ever since, the county's white, middle-class residents have taken on a symbolism that far outweighs their numerical clout. Stories about voting behavior in Macomb County have become a quadrennial staple of political journalism, as reporters from everywhere beat a path to these suburbs just north of Detroit. An Irish television crew recently dropped in, to the amazement of absolutely nobody. These media pilgrims pay homage to a resilient piece of conventional wisdom. In Macomb County, more than Michigan's 17 electoral votes may be on the line. It might be said that the way Macomb County goes, so goes the nation.

That would be very good news for McCain, if summertime polls hold up. Although he trails Barack Obama in Michigan, he is leading in Macomb County. Is it possible that we'll soon hear about a new voter bloc called "McCain Democrats"?

Forty-eight years ago, Macomb County was the most Democratic suburban county in the United States. JFK took 63 percent of its votes. LBJ and Hubert Humphrey also racked up big wins in 1964 and 1968. Then things started to change. The county trended Republican, and by 1984 the pendulum had swung about as far as it could in the other direction: Ronald Reagan captured 66 percent of Macomb County.

Shortly after that rout, frustrated Michigan Democrats decided to figure out what had gone wrong. They teamed with the United Auto Workers to hire Stanley Greenberg, a onetime Yale professor who had left academia for the world of public-opinion polling. Through phone surveys and the emerging science of focus-group interviews, he studied the Democrats' dilemma. He presented his findings in 1985, first at a meeting of state party chairs in Chicago and then to national leaders in Washington, D.C. "I didn't realize that my ideas would be controversial," says Greenberg.

But they were. Greenberg explained Macomb County's realignment through the lens of what he called "Reagan Democrats." The term is so familiar nowadays that it's easy to forget that Greenberg coined it, or that anybody would consider it provocative. Simply put, Greenberg argued that a core of Macomb County's voters—white, middle-class, lacking a college education, heavily Catholic, and often from card-carrying union families—had soured on their traditional party. His analysis focused on the residents of a specific place, but it carried national implications, because voters of

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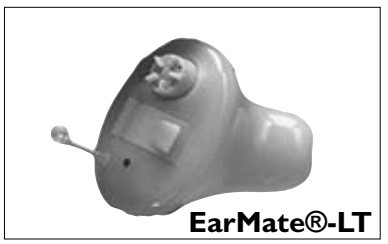
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this type lived everywhere from Scranton to Spokane.

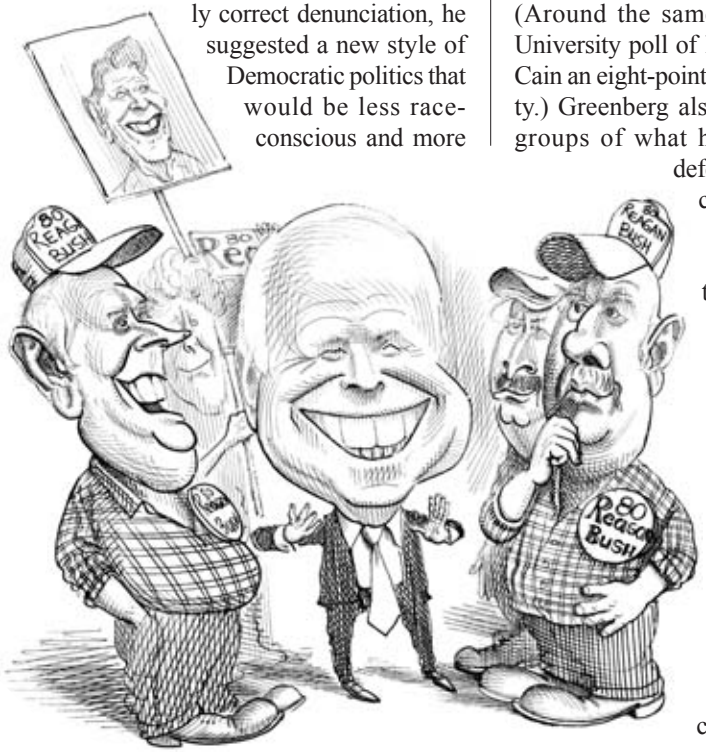
Race had a lot to do with their political shift, said Greenberg. Reagan Democrats were especially turned off by forced busing and racial preferences. They remained resentful over Detroit's race riots in the 1960s. In his 1995 book *Middle Class Dreams*, Greenberg summed up their attitudes this way: "These white Democratic defectors expressed a profound distaste for black Americans, a sentiment that pervaded almost everything they thought about government and politics."

Many people in Macomb County found this interpretation patronizing. "He wanted it to be about racism, racism, racism," says Leon Drolet, a Republican county commissioner whose father was a Reagan-voting UAW member. In truth, a lot of other factors also contributed to the county's political transformation. Democrats were becoming the party of abortion on demand. This didn't sit well in Macomb County, which continued to elect the likes of David Bonior—a thoroughly partisan Democrat who nevertheless maintained a pro-life voting record in Congress. Concerns about patriotism, the military, and national security also played a large role, appropriately enough for a county named after a 19th-century Army general.

Still, Greenberg zeroed in on race. But instead of issuing a politically correct denunciation, he suggested a new style of Democratic politics that would be less race-conscious and more class-oriented. At the time, however, Jesse Jackson was between his two presidential runs. His influence within the party was strong, and his allies refused to give Greenberg a hearing. "I was kind of banned within party circles," says the pollster.

Unlike the Reagan Democrats, Greenberg didn't bolt his party. Instead, he became a key adviser to the Democratic Leadership Council, a moderate group that would propel Bill Clinton to the presidency. Clinton himself was receptive to Greenberg's ideas about race and class. His high-profile criticism of anti-white statements by Sister Souljah, a rap performer who appeared at a Jackson-sponsored event with Clinton, came at Greenberg's urging. It was part of a strategy to win back Reagan Democrats, and it appears to have paid off: Clinton lost Macomb County in 1992, but by only five points. It was a huge improvement over the blowouts. In 1996, Clinton became the first Democrat to carry the county since Humphrey, winning by eleven points. Since then, the election returns have tightened. Al Gore carried Macomb County by two points in 2000, and President Bush snatched it by one point in 2004.

Earlier this year, Greenberg decided to take a fresh look at Macomb County. He polled likely voters in July and found McCain ahead of Obama by seven points. (Around the same time, a Quinnipiac University poll of likely voters gave McCain an eight-point advantage in the county.) Greenberg also convened six focus groups of what he calls "Democratic defectors" to gain a more complete view of their political thinking.



ROMAN GENN

As it happens, authentic Reagan Democrats may be a vanishing breed. At the very least, they're an aging demographic: To have established a pattern of voting Democratic before switching to the GOP during the Reagan years, you have to be at least in your late 40s. "We should stop calling them Democrats, because they've become Republicans," adds Ed Bruley, the head of the Macomb County Democratic party.

Labels aside, there can be no doubt that Obama has a problem in Macomb County. Polls show that 52 percent of its voters say they would be comfortable with "a Democrat" as president, but only 41 percent say they would be comfortable with a President Obama. Greenberg calls this an "Obama gap" and urges the candidate to close it by focusing on middle-class economic anxieties. There's no comparable "McCain gap": About half of the county's voters would be comfortable with either "a Republican" or McCain as president.

McCain holds a few distinct advantages over his rival. He has campaigned in Macomb County before—he won Michigan's GOP primary in 2000 and was back again in 2008, losing to native son Mitt Romney. Meanwhile, Obama didn't even appear on the state's Democratic primary ballot this year because of an intra-party squabble over the primary's timing. Finally, Michigan voters may have soured on political sensations with law degrees from Harvard: Their tax-raising Democratic governor, Jennifer Granholm, is even less popular than President Bush. "If you like what Jennifer Granholm has done for Michigan, you're going to love what Barack Obama will do for America," says state GOP chairman Saul Anuzis, in a line that Michigan Republicans are bound to repeat this fall.

Yet Obama may be the source of his own problems. "If Hillary Clinton was the Democratic nominee or even the vice-presidential nominee, the election in Macomb County would already be over—she'd win it," says Candice Miller, a Republican who represents a chunk of the county in Congress. Now Palin may give McCain a boost. "She's a hockey mom and we're Hockeytown," says Jim Carabelli, the head of the Macomb County Republicans. "She's had to stay at the rink and drink hot coffee to keep warm. She's real people. She'll relate to Michigan." At the Sterling Heights event on September 5, the locals gave her a Detroit Red Wings jersey.

What does Obama's race have to do with it? If Obama loses this election, liberal pundits are sure to blame racist Americans for rejecting a black candidate in what will otherwise be a strong year for Democrats. Greenberg insists that this would be a mistake. "When you talk to

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Democratic defectors in Macomb County today, they give no sense of feeling threatened by blacks," he says. "These voters are open to Obama, even now. If he loses, I'll be able to come up with ten different explanations as to why, equally strong." Nationally, for instance, voters say they prefer McCain to Obama on national-security issues by 26 points. In Macomb County, however, McCain's lead grows to 43 points. Among Democratic defectors, it's 69 points—a margin that Greenberg calls "breathtaking." Moreover, when pollsters summarized the candidates' public-policy positions without associating them with either McCain or Obama, they learned that Macomb County voters favored McCain's views.

That summarizes the challenge for McCain between now and Election Day: to connect with voters whose hearts are tugging them toward the Democrats but whose heads are telling them that, for the White House at least, they prefer this Republican. **NR**

■ **2008 VI**

A Ticklish Position

Republicans run against the first black presidential nominee

JAY NORDLINGER

GUESS who came to dinner, during the presidential election of 2008? Barack Obama, the junior senator from Illinois—and he is the first black nominee ever. This is big and cheering news, given American history. And no fair saying that he's not a descendant of slaves. And no fair saying that, actually, he's half white. That's not the way it works in America, for better or worse. (Almost certainly worse.)

The country has always abided by the "one-drop rule," mentally at least. And there is an old, sharp saying: America is the only country in which a white woman can give birth to a black baby, but a black woman can't give birth to a white baby.

There have been other black presidential aspirants, to be sure—most prominently Jesse Jackson and, after him, Al Sharpton. But they were really running to be president of black America—to secure the Dr. King position. They had basically no hope of winning the Democratic nomination, much less the presidency.

And then came Obama, "the first mainstream African American," said Joe Biden, further describing him as "articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy." (What ever happened to Biden, by the way?) Back in the bad old days—before he went respectable—Sharpton referred to people like Obama as "cocktail-sip Negroes." But now every-

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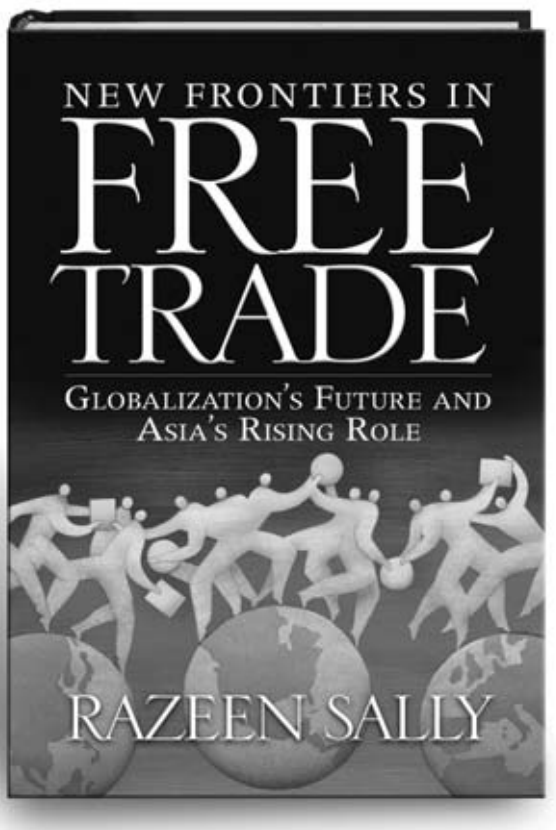

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one's on board; a racial pride, understandably, is involved.

For years, many of us thought that the first black president would be a conservative—and same with the first woman: a black American in the mold of Clarence Thomas; a woman in the mold of Margaret Thatcher (American version). But 2008—which has brought both Obama and Hillary Clinton to the fore—has put those assumptions to the test. In many ways, it would be easier, for the country at large, if the black nominee were the Republican, rather than the Democratic. For one thing, would liberals regard him as "authentically black"? For another, they could run against him with abandon, with hardly a thought to race.

But the black nominee is the Democratic one, and he is thought, by many people, to be a redeemer figure—the one who will heal the land, especially of its racial wounds. Oprah Winfrey referred to him as "the one," and, the way she said it, you could almost hear capital letters.

So, the Republicans have a big challenge: They stand in the way of "history," proposing to stop the first black nominee from becoming president. That is the distasteful role of spoiler. And the electorate must feel an unease, too: If you vote for McCain-Palin, against Obama-Biden, will you have to wear a big scarlet "R," for racist?

Some are weighing in early—saying that, if Obama should happen to lose, it will be because of racism. The editor of *Slate* magazine, Jacob Weisberg, wrote an article entitled "If Obama Loses." And the subtitle: "Racism is the only reason McCain might beat him." You can't get more explicit than that.

Yes, the Republicans are in a ticklish position—very ticklish. A couple of weeks ago, some of us were talking with a McCain operative, and the subject of race—and its delicacy—came up. I related a story. National Review had done an Obama cover, with the word "Enigma." And several people e-mailed me, saying, "You're going to regret doing that." Why? "Because of the second syllable of that word." Oh, come on: That wouldn't have occurred to me in a thousand years.

But the McCain operative said he understood entirely—the campaign, he told us, scrubs everything it puts out, with just that sensitivity in mind. And Sarah Palin learned something after her convention speech: If you mock "community organizers"—even in retaliation for mockery of small-town mayors—you might find yourself accused of racism.

If you vote for McCain-Palin, against Obama-Biden, will you have to wear a big scarlet 'R,' for racist?

As for Obama, he is sometimes "post-racial," sometimes not. Consider his behavior in two U.S. Senate campaigns, waged in 2006. The Republican nominee in Maryland was a black conservative named Michael Steele; the Democratic nominee was a white liberal named Ben Cardin. Obama went to campaign for Cardin, saying the following at a black university: "Listen, I think it's great that the Republican party has discovered black people. [Ha, ha.] But here's the thing: You don't vote for somebody because of what they look like. You vote for somebody because of what they stand for."

Great, great. But then he went to Tennessee to campaign for Harold Ford Jr., a black Democrat. Ford was running against a white Republican named Bob Corker. And Obama went to black churches saying, "I'm feeling lonely in Washington" (as the only black senator). Well, which is it?

And he has used race from time to time in the presidential campaign, too. Most notoriously, he has preemptively accused Republicans of racist campaigning: "They're going to try to make you afraid of me—'He's young and inexperienced and he's got a funny name. And did I mention he's black?'" No, no one had, actually. He used race against Bill Clinton, too, which bothered the former president no end. "You gotta really go some to play the race card with me," he fumed to a radio station. "My office is in Harlem, and Harlem voted for Hillary, by the way."

More than a few of us observed that Clinton and his wife got a taste of what it's like to be a Republican.

Speaking of Republicans, they are treated differently, when they are black—not the same as Democrats. Take three nominees in 2006: the aforementioned Michael Steele; Lynn Swann, who ran for governor in Pennsylvania; and Kenneth Blackwell, who ran for governor in Ohio. As a rule, they weren't regarded as black candidates—they were regarded as conservatives, which they were. Fine, fine. And they were all beaten by garden-variety white liberals.

And no one said history had been thwarted. No one accused Marylanders, Pennsylvanians, or Ohioans of racism.

Democrats like to laugh at Republicans for having so few black officeholders—and more than laugh, they like to charge racism. Problem is, the Democrats are very good at beating black Republican conservatives—with those white liberals. For a while, the only black Republican in Congress was Rep. Gary Franks of Connecticut. The Democrats, affronted at his presence, worked hard to unseat him. And they did—allowing them to say, "Ha, ha—a little short on blacks, huh?" Well . . .

One more story: In 1989, when Douglas Wilder ran for governor of Virginia, there was great excitement in the land (read: in the media): Wilder, a Democrat, would be the first black governor, of any state, since Reconstruction. (He won.) But a few years earlier, in my home state of Michigan, there had been a black gubernatorial nominee named William Lucas. *He* would have been the first black governor. But he was a conservative Republican, generating no national excitement, and denounced by all the usual forces. He lost—beaten by a garden-variety white liberal. Ho-hum.

George W. Bush, as it happens, is incapable of picking other than black secretaries of state. Does he get any credit for this—racial credit? No, and he probably wouldn't welcome it. But I like something that Bob Ehrlich, the former governor of Maryland, once said: "If Condoleezza Rice were a liberal Democrat, they'd have parades down Fifth Avenue for her, and she'd be on the cover of *Time* magazine every week."

Some people say that McCain has now blunted the race issue with the choice of

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Palin: you know, "history" versus "history." But are conservative women regarded as women (by those "usual forces")? Are Hispanic conservatives regarded as Hispanic?

A marvelous tidbit came out of the recent University of Michigan affirmative-action case before the Supreme Court. The university had been unsure whether to count Cuban Americans as Hispanic. Here's how a Michigan official put it: "Don't they vote Republican?"

Chances are, we will never know what role race played in the 2008 presidential election. We have a secret ballot. You pull the curtain closed behind you, and you don't have to tell anybody whom you voted for. Nor do you have to say why you voted as you did. A good many people—including first-rank political analysts—believe that Mitt Romney was denied the Republican nomination because of anti-Mormon prejudice. It is not provable, although some exit and other polling is suggestive.

We can be sure that some Americans will vote for Obama because he is black, and that some will vote against him for the same reason. How will it all shake out? Some Republicans have taken to pointing out: "Well, the country is split between Democrats and Republicans. If Obama loses, and racism is to be charged—won't that be on the heads of white Democrats?"

I have an anecdote to share—merely an anecdote, but not nothing. I know a Democrat who volunteered for Hillary in New Hampshire. Her job—my friend's job—was to contact known Hillary supporters and verify that they were still firm. And, to her shock and dismay, many said yes—while citing the race of the other candidate.

Let me stay in the realm of anecdotes for a moment: After the Democratic convention, I lingered in Denver for a couple of days. And three times—no fewer—young black men asked me whether I had attended the convention. (This was in restaurants and a hotel.) I said I had. Then they said, somewhat tentatively, "What did you think of the speech?" (meaning Obama's). I said I thought it was fabulous (which I did—as a piece of oratory). In each case, the young man beamed and beamed.

This sort of feeling simply cannot be discounted. If Obama loses, there will be pain—more than the usual amount of pain following Election Day. A writer named Fatimah Ali, columnist for the *Philadelphia Daily News*, said, "If McCain wins, look for a full-fledged race and class war." Would it be as bad as that? There would certainly be stokers of grievance, as there forever are.

I repeat, there is an unease in this election, owing to race. There won't always be, in these presidential elections. And won't that be a great, fresh-aired day? **NR**

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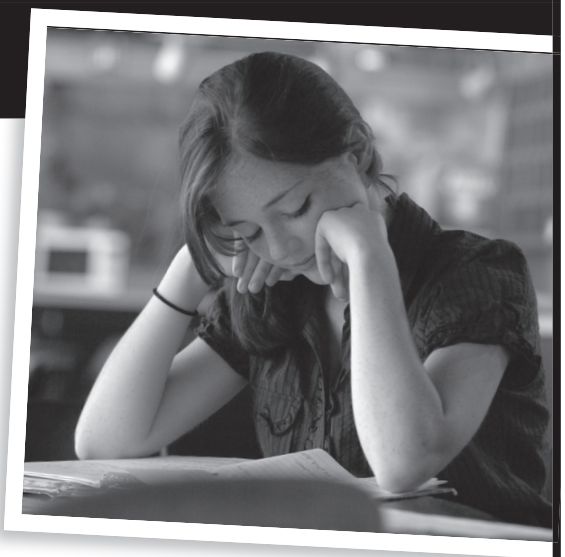

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■ THE WORLD

The Next Great Game

Oil, gas, Russian gangsterism, the future of moderate Islam—much is at stake in Azerbaijan

ROB LONG

"Of course, this is your first time to Azerbaijan," a young Azerbaijani said to me when we dined together a few weeks ago in Baku, the capital of his nation.

"Well, no, actually," I told him. I had been to Azerbaijan eight years before and had spent a week or so in Baku, which was just then starting to shake off the dust of Soviet domination and a bloody war with Armenia to discover, Jed Clampett–style, that all that Caspian Sea oil meant only one thing: *Baby, we're rich*.

My host's eyes narrowed a bit. He was a smooth, well-educated financier working in a high office in Azerbaijan's fat oil fund, and he remembered Baku in 2000. And he clearly wondered about a person who had visited there from the West for no particular reason. He smiled at me, but it was an *I'm going to be watching you* kind of smile.

But for me, eight years ago, steaming into Baku Harbor on a smoking, acrid-smelling passenger ferry from Turkmenbashi, Turkmenistan—a country run at the time by a Mini-Me version of Kim Jong Il—Baku was *already* positively Paris: wide European boulevards; snazzy Western clothes; a charmingly preserved Old Town downtown, complete with restored castle fortifications and a mysterious "Maiden's Tower." Anchoring the streets, the giant wedding-cake mansions built by the oil barons of the late 19th and early 20th centuries—people with names like Nobel and Rothschild—gave the city a faded glamour.

Also: In Baku eight years ago you could get ice cream and a box of Chicken McNuggets, which, trust me, after months of grilled mutton, greasy rice in cottonseed oil, and dirty, tumor-shaped radishes, is a magnificent and sophisticated luxury.

Central Asia stops at the eastern shore of the Caspian—on that side, eight years ago, the Soviet system's bleak futility had worked its way deep into the weave of life. Thickset women shuffled along with fraying bags of gray produce; men spent time at the *chaikhanas* drinking (sometimes) tea and (mostly) vodka. "Well," I said to myself back then, "it's awfully nice of the Saudis to build all of these schools! At least the kids are getting a religious education."

Yes, well. Sorry about that.

Azerbaijan, though, would have none of it. Headscarves are rarer in Baku than in London, which isn't saying much but is saying something. Young couples walk hand-in-hand downtown, and pretty much every Azerbaijani will bore you with forceful declarations of religious tolerance. They will also politely insist—and if necessary, will produce a map to prove—that they are a Caucasian nation, west of the Caspian, north of the Middle East.

Azerbaijan is movin' on up, or at least making a heroic try at it. It currently possesses the seventh-largest sovereign wealth fund in the world—pretty obvious from the Zegna store and the ubiquitous cell phones—and it's the sole supplier of the crude that sluices through the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline, which snakes its way across Azerbaijan and Georgia, terminating in Turkey. It has a capacity of about a million barrels a day, which isn't enough to satisfy a thirsty Europe, but is enough to provide a useful alternative to Russia's near-monopoly and a check on Putin's violent mischief. And when the oil pipeline is combined in a few years with a natural-gas pipeline, which will pump about 16 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year, Azerbaijan will be in the right place at the right time.

Except, of course, for its neighbors.

Azerbaijan prides itself on its secular Islamic society, and frets about the extreme fundamentalism in Iran, to the south. "The people here," a young diplomat told me as he poked his way through a series of screens on his iPhone, "they don't even know the difference between Sunni and Shia." But millions of ethnic Azeris live in Iran, and Iran is routinely accused of (and occasionally caught red-handed) trying to export its brand of Islamic revolution.

To the north, Russia's war in Georgia may have had several murky instigations, but the message, at least to the Azerbaijanis, is clear: Russia has transformed itself into an immense gangster state focused on protecting its economic interests. Which comprise, basically, oil.

So when a mysterious explosion goes off near the BTC pipeline's terminus in Turkey—a bomb first attributed to the Kurdish terrorist organization PKK—people in Baku instantly think, *Russians*.

And every few moments during my visit, it seemed, I was buttonholed by an Azerbaijani executive or media figure who wanted to talk about the war with Armenia. In the early 1990s, as the Soviet Union collapsed, Armenia invaded the Azerbaijani region of Nagorno-Karabakh—with provocation, they say; unprovoked, say the Azerbaijanis—and the result mirrored the almost simultaneous conflict in the former Yugoslavia: peaceful, multi-ethnic villages exploding into violence; accusations of genocide; a sudden influx of weapons (to Armenia, from Russia); and exhausted indifference from the rest of the world.

In Baku, anti-Armenian protests and violence shattered the peace, prompting a crackdown by the Russians. "Martyr's Alley," a grim avenue of graves and monuments in Baku, is a reminder of that war. While Russian guns were pounding Georgia, more than one Azerbaijani suggested I walk up to Martyr's Alley and take a look, to see what the Russians were up to across the border.

The war, technically, is frozen: Armenia still occupies almost one-third of Azerbaijan's legal territory, Baku houses its refugees in unbelievable squalor, and everybody waits for the West to solve the hot, distracting crises in the Middle East, Iraq, Africa, etc., before getting around to this one.

I was asked to give my thoughts about the issue on Azerbaijani television. I tugged thoughtfully at my chin and muttered pieties about understanding and compromise and international dialogue.

But what I wanted to say was, *You people are pumping a million barrels of oil a day! You want Nagorno-Karabakh back? Make the Armenians an offer!* I was surrounded by diplomats and reporters and

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earnest, thoughtful Azerbaijanis, and I thought it might seem rude. I hadn't gone there to solve a decades-old conflict, after all.

Which raises the question: Why *was* I there?

I was a guest of the Azerbaijani Diplomatic Academy, ferried over with a handful of other journalists to participate in a conference—"Azerbaijan and the United States: How We See Each Other." We all sat around a huge conference table with a lot of Azerbaijanis in media and government, but nobody said anything particularly memorable or interesting.

The junket's real purpose was to show us a modern, secular, westward-tilting, pro-American Muslim republic. The Azerbaijanis are justly proud of their 21st-century perspective on things—they are fervently pro-Israel; harbor ambitions to join NATO and the EU; routinely crack down on Wahhabism in the mosques; hold Iran's influence at bay; and have built an oil-and-gas pipeline delivering energy independence to Europe, an act guaranteed to infuriate the Russians.

It's not a perfect place. Heydar Aliyev, the former Soviet Politburo member who ruled Azerbaijan like a benevolent strongman, died in 2003 and was replaced by his son. Opposition leaders occasionally end up in the hospital, along with a few pesky journalists. An American diplomat I spoke to used terms like "slow progress" and "cultural differences" when talking about things like free elections and secure ballots. And portraits of the dead leader practically festoon Baku—on billboards and in shop windows, smiling with children and looking to the future with a purposeful gaze. It's sort of creepy.

That I *did* say to my host. Maybe it was the Azerbaijani wine (not bad with mutton) or maybe it was last-day audacity. But as dinner wound down, I asked him about the cult of personality that has built up around the man since his death, about the possibility of creating an actual multiparty political democracy, about the journalists.

He put down his wine. The journalists, he told me, were a mistake. We need to change that. Democracy will come with oil prosperity, with better schools and roads and an infrastructure that brings the villages and remoter areas into modernity. And as for those Aliyev portraits—here he got serious—well, Aliyev is our country's George Washington. Aliyev was the architect of the Azerbaijan State Oil Fund itself—he negotiated the fees, he drove the hard bargains with BP and others, and he made sure that the money was well spent.

"Considering our neighborhood," he said, "I think it's fair to call him a great man."

I tugged on my chin thoughtfully.

"It *is* a tough neighborhood," I said.

"It *is* a tough neighborhood," he agreed. **NR**

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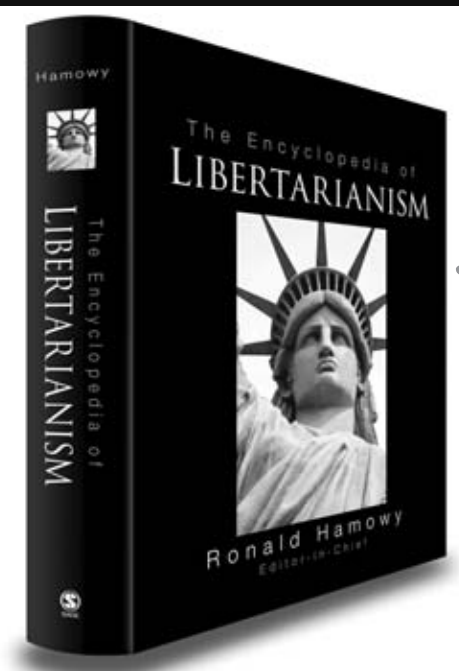

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Palin Fire

Alaska's governor inspires conservatives; but can she lead them?

ROSS DOUTHAT

THERE was a time not so very long ago—around the last week of August, in fact—when it was possible to imagine that Sarah Palin, governor of Alaska, might be one of the least polarizing choices for vice president that John McCain could make.

Here was a politician with the conservative street cred to avoid the sort of intra-party civil war that would have greeted a McCain-Lieberman ticket, but whose ties to Bush Republicanism were weak enough that the media and the Democrats would have a tough time marrying her to the GOP's unpopular brand. Her chief political enemies were corrupt Alaska Republicans beloved of neither party; she had declined to endorse any candidate in the GOP primary; she had spoken favorably about Barack Obama's popularity in Alaska during a summer *New Yorker* interview; her record and signature issues—ethics reform, a natural-gas pipeline—were light-years removed from the debates that consumed the Beltway during the Bush administration. The most controversial aspect of her nomination would be her lack of national-security experience—but this disadvantage would be more conducive to fretful Sunday-talk-show chin-stroking than to media feeding frenzies.

In hindsight, this take on Palin's candidacy looks downright crazy. It misses the extent to which America's culture war really is about *culture*—and thus the way that Palin herself, independent of her record, public statements, or policy positions, is a hand grenade lobbed into what was shaping up to be a rather dull campaign season. Watching the Left and the mainstream media respond to Palin's nomination was like watching a bull react to a flapping scarlet bathrobe. They just couldn't help themselves. The whole Palin ménage was just . . . too . . . much. Her five kids! Her five kids' *names*! Her Down syndrome baby! Her guns and snowmobiles . . . sorry, make that snow*machines*! Her evangelical church! And then, in the twist that launched a thousand bloviations . . . her pregnant teenage daughter!

It was Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas all over again, except this time around the mommy wars were rolled into the mix, and the blogosphere was on hand to feed a steady stream of lies, innuendo, and half-truths to credulous news outlets and talking heads. Nothing encapsulated the hysteria quite like the moment when Mort Kondracke—Mort Kondracke!—greeted the news of Bristol Palin's pregnancy with an outburst about how this should persuade the poor girl's mother to rethink her (fictive, but never mind, it was too good to check) support for abstinence-only education. It was downhill from there: By the time Palin's big St. Paul debut rolled around, one half-expected Ted Kennedy to rise from the gallery thundering about the back-alley abortions and segregated lunch counters that we could expect in "Sarah Palin's America"—except this time the speech would be set to the percussion of a thousand Daily Kos diarists typing frantically in the background.

Yes, it was Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas all over again . . . except that somebody rewrote the ending. Palin wasn't vanquished, like Bork, and she didn't limp to a victory that left her forever stereotyped by the chattering classes as an embittered troglodyte, as Justice Thomas did. Instead she gave a speech—and the world turned on a dime. Instead of the Borking of Sarah Palin, conservatives found themselves celebrating Palinmania '08, with much of the press, however temporarily, cheering along.

While pondering exactly how this happened, conservatives should be honest with themselves about The Speech, which was good but not all *that* good—not Reagan good, by any stretch, and arguably not even "Barack Obama at the '04 Democratic Convention" good. Certainly there was nothing in the text or in Palin's delivery to justify the representative case of whiplash experienced by the *Washington Post*'s Sally Quinn, who went from fretting about the Alaska governor's ability to put her country first while serving as a mother *and* a vice president to telling a national television audience that she had badly misjudged Palin, and regretted it—all in the space of just 24 hours, and after watching a single 45-minute speech. But then logic had little or nothing to do with what happened. In its effect on Quinn and countless others, Sarah Palin's address to the GOP convention was the equivalent of Toto's yanking back the curtain on Oz the Great and Terrible. The media mob looked daunting enough, but that was mainly smoke and mirrors; all it took for them to drop from Palin's throat to her feet was a

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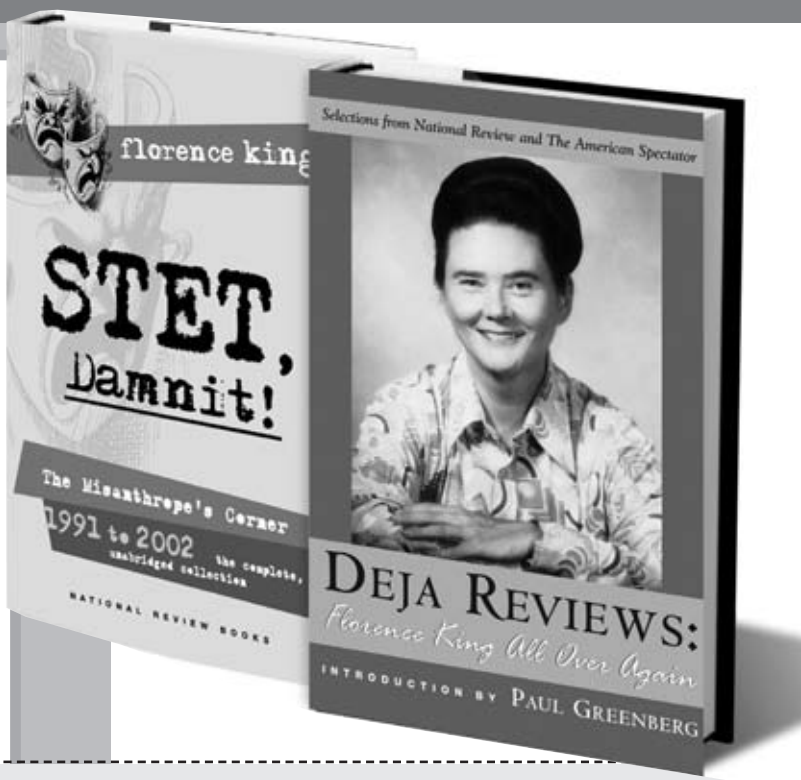

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quick wit, a happy-warrior attitude, an intuitive feel for the rhythms of public speaking, and a spine of steel underneath all the charm. Somewhere in the next life, no doubt, the Gipper was nodding approvingly; somewhere in this one, meanwhile, Robert Bork was probably wondering if he should have invested in rimless glasses and a razor before his confirmation hearings.

CONSERVATIVE ICON

Since that night in St. Paul, Sarah Palin has entered uncharted territory for a right-of-center politician. She's become the first conservative ever to *benefit* from a full-scale Borking and to emerge from the media gauntlet stronger than when she entered it. Within 48 hours of being picked as John McCain's running mate, it was clear that the governor would become an icon to conservatives, who fell instantly in love for the same identitarian reasons that drove the online Left around the bend: She embodies a right-wing archetype of the Real America in much the way that Barack Obama embodies a left-wing archetype of Multicultural Man. Conservatives then had their affection cemented by the ugliness of the media's "vetting" process. But most conservative icons since Reagan haven't become national icons: Only George W. Bush, floating on post-9/11 enthusiasm, achieved that lofty perch, and he just as quickly lost it. This is the opportunity that remains, for now, within Palin's grasp, should she have the wit and luck to seize it. Any Republican can polarize the country, but she might have the gift for *positive* polarization, which is a considerably rarer thing.

Debut night

Of course there's a sense in which this sort of analysis is running way ahead of events. As of this writing, Palin has spent less than three weeks on the national stage, and there may be gaffes beyond counting in her future or a gang of skeletons waiting to clatter out of Alaska's frosty closets.

But the primal bond she's forged with the conservative base, and the extent to which this bond seems to transcend the usual intra-movement divides, is a remarkable achievement regardless of what happens to the McCain-Palin ticket this fall. And should she come through the campaign in one piece, it's an achievement that bodes very well for her future in national politics. Alone among the current crop of prominent GOP politicians, she isn't on probation with the rank-and-file, and that affords her a freedom that no Republican since the post-9/11 Bush has enjoyed: the freedom to work toward a new conservative majority instead of just trying to prove her loyalty to the last one.

This is a great gift, given the party's present straits. David Brooks recently observed that "political parties usually reform in the wilderness. They suffer some crushing defeat, the old guard is discredited and the pain compels turnover and change." But today's Republican party, he noted, is trying to revamp and modernize after years in the majority *without* going into the wilderness—"with the old guard still around, and with a party base that still hasn't accepted the need to transform."

The strain of this task was evident throughout the primary season, in which a slew of interesting candidates, many of whom had the potential to re-brand the GOP in various ways, spent most of their time struggling to fit their records and personae into the same constrictive "Mr. Conservative" box. And it was evident at the convention itself, where those same candidates—the Romneys and Rudys and Huckabees—were assigned to preach to the choir rather than seek the conversion of whatever curious unbelievers might have happened to flick on CNN or Fox at 8:42 P.M. or so. The pathos of Romney, in particular—an immensely talented man whose "I'll be Reagan, if that's what you want!" campaign earned him the contempt of the media and the suspicion of swing voters without winning him the affections of the base—was a reminder of just how hard it is to be a politician in a party that needs to change but isn't ready to.

But Palin doesn't have to prove anything to the voters who raised their eyebrows at Romney and Huckabee, nodded politely along with Rudy and McCain, and pined for Fred Thompson to show a little belly-fire. She has been bound to right-wing America, and right-wing America to her, by the experience of that three-day Borking. And whether she's working out of Juneau or the Naval Observatory come January, she'll have the freedom to create a new conservative portfolio without constantly looking over her shoulder, worried about whether she's straying too far off the reservation and whether she's about to get an earful from the Right for deviationism. Identity politics can be constraining, but in the right circumstances it can be liberating as well—and the "she's one of us" factor may end up giving Sarah Palin more room to maneuver than any conservative leader since Reagan.

WHAT IS PALIN'S AGENDA?

If she wants it, that is. Part of Palin's appeal, in a conservative movement riven by factionalism, is that nobody knows exactly what she wants. She has been an active and effective governor, but Alaska isn't the nation by any stretch, and the right-of-center pragmatism that she applied to her home state's problems could take her in a variety of directions now that she has to grapple with a different and broader set of issues. It's possible to imagine her assuming a variety of political identities—libertarian, populist, and anything in between. But it's also possible to imagine her being entirely defined by her celebrity, never grappling seriously with policy substance in the way that the GOP desperately needs its leadership to do.

For the moment, her only agenda is John McCain's agenda, which is as it should be. But there are many aspects of the McCain agenda—especially that whole domestic-policy business—with which McCain himself is not eager to be bothered and where Palin,

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as a candidate and perhaps as a vice president, will have the opportunity to place her stamp.

How and where that stamp is placed—and whether it's placed at all—will go a long way toward determining whether Palin can transform her current post-Borking honeymoon into the kind of enduring appeal that transcends party lines and wins national elections. She'll be tempted to coast on her stunning popularity: The post-convention mania has demonstrated that conservatives love a star almost as much as liberals do, and I suspect that Palin will be able to turn out a crowd for years to come, whatever happens to her image among swing voters. And she'll be tempted, as well, to cede the shaping of her political identity to the army of consultants that's no doubt currently swarming around her, offering to educate her in the ways of Washington and provide ready-made answers to every question she faces. And if she does manage to strike out on her own, she may seek to remake herself as a foreign-policy maven, the better to confound the critics who expect her to fumble the distinction between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, or to start a shooting war with Russia over fishing rights in the Bering Strait.

Obviously, America needs a vice president who's up to speed on national security. But neither Palin's country nor her party needs another Republican politician who keeps changing the subject when the conversation turns to health care, or the environment, or education, or quality-of-life issues. What's needed instead is a right-wing Clinton—a politician with an eye for domestic innovation and an ability (which John McCain conspicuously lacks) to translate complicated policy proposals into language the average voter understands.

Whether Palin has this gift remains to be seen. But she should make it her business to find out—first, by making herself the mistress of McCain's domestic-policy agenda over the next two months; and then, should the ticket be defeated, by carving out a distinctive agenda of her own. There is no shortage of issues that would mesh well with her Sam's Club Republican persona—think family-friendly tax reform, restoration of our infrastructure, or an innovation-based approach to fighting climate change. But she needs to be bold enough to look beyond her talking points to champion ideas that separate her brand of right-wing politics from the exhausted conservatism that's watching the country slip slowly from its grip.

The danger for Palin is that the division of labor on display at the convention—where she played the attack dog and McCain, with evident discomfort, played the domestic-policy wonk—will persist until November, in which case she'll have missed an enormous opportunity to wed her symbolic working-class appeal to substance. And the more substance-free she seems, the more she'll end up vindicating her liberal critics, who already regard her candidacy the way conservatives regard Barack Obama's run for president—as an essentially unserious exercise, an embarrassing triumph of style over substance. We know that she has a great story, and that she gives a good speech, but the questions that have dogged Obama will be applied to her soon enough, whether in this election cycle or in the uncharted political future that awaits her beyond Election Day.

"What exactly is our opponent's plan?" Palin asked in St. Paul. "What does he actually seek to accomplish?" Those are questions she'll have to answer herself, soon enough, if she aspires to lead Republicans and not merely to be applauded by them. **NR**

■ 2008 VII

Biden's Baggage

That foreign-policy heft will be hard to carry

ANDREW C. McCARTHY

Tiny Delaware barely registers in the Electoral College, but Barack Obama selected Joseph R. Biden Jr., the state's senior senator, as his running mate. There's one explanation: foreign-policy heft. Biden has tons. Obama has none.

Biden, who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is the doyen of transnational progressives, Rolodex bursting with this *chargé d'affaires* and that secretary-general, bookshelves buckling under back issues of *Foreign Affairs*. Even in scandal, he's a man of the world: The plagiarism that derailed his 1988 presidential run found him lifting phrases from Neil Kinnock, a fixture of the British Left who steered Labour through serial drubbings. For Democrats and the Council on Foreign Relations crowd, that episode was more an overeager demonstration of good taste than a natural progression from Biden's earlier misappropriation of a law-review article, which nearly got him expelled from law school. Democrats savor the thought of their Joe lecturing a jejune Alaskan hockey mom on the finer points of *ententes cordiales* when the candidates debate next month.

But if Iraq is the topic, a more interesting debate would pit Biden against . . . Biden. By comparison, John Kerry is a paragon of consistency: Biden was not merely for the Iraq War before he was against it; he was also against it before he was for it.

As President George H. W. Bush launched the 1991 Gulf War to drive Saddam Hussein's marauding army out of Kuwait, Biden argued passionately against doing so—a position he later admitted was a mistake. He subsequently morphed from Iraq dove to Iraq hawk, a transformation that happened to coincide with the election of a Democratic administration. In 1993, when Bill Clinton ordered a cruise-missile attack on an empty Iraqi intelligence headquarters in response to Saddam's assassination plot against Bush, Biden was a staunch supporter. By early 1998, the born-again hawk was imploring Clinton to take military action against Iraq. Worried about the dictator's "ability to produce the most deadly weapons known to mankind," Biden warned that, "left unchecked, Saddam Hussein would in short order be in a position to threaten and blackmail our regional allies, our troops, and, indeed, our nation."

Though he now repeats the Left's charge that the Bush administration willfully misconstrued intelligence coming out of Iraq, the Clinton-era Biden dismissed the very notion that there

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existed any reliable intelligence on Baghdad's arsenal. "As long as Saddam's at the helm," he inveighed during a September 1998 hearing, "there is no reasonable prospect [that] . . . any . . . inspector is ever going to be able to guarantee that we have rooted out . . . the entirety of Saddam's [WMD] program." Along with John McCain, Biden agitated for the Iraq Liberation Act, which made seeking regime change in Baghdad the policy of the United States. And in December 1998, the Delaware Democrat strongly backed Operation Desert Fox, in which Clinton ordered four days of bombing attacks without congressional authorization or Security Council approval.

By late 2001, a Republican was in the White House and post-9/11 polls reflected public demand for robust action against terrorists and rogue states. Biden comfortably reprised his Iraq saber-rattling. Al-Qaeda's atrocities convinced him that the assurance of superpower retaliation was no longer sufficient to discourage America's enemies. It didn't matter to him that Iraq was not an imminent threat; Biden saw the economic sanctions faltering, presumed Iraq's weapons programs remained viable, and argued that U.N. resolutions should be strictly enforced. "If we wait for the danger from Saddam to become clear," he reasoned, "it could be too late."

By the summer of 2002, Biden was publicly stating that war with Iraq was a virtual certainty—tracking his 1998 assertion that "the only way we're going to get rid of Saddam Hussein is we're going to end up having to start it alone . . . . It's going to require guys . . . in uniform to be back on foot in the desert taking Saddam down." Countering critics of his October 2002 pro-war vote, he insisted, "I do not believe this is a rush to war. I believe it is a march to peace and security. . . . [Saddam Hussein] possesses chemical and biological weapons and is seeking nuclear weapons." Though Biden predicted a lengthy, difficult battle, he stressed the imperative of persevering: "We must be clear with the American people that we are committing to Iraq for the long haul; not just the day after, but the decade after."

Biden hedged his bets, of course, co-sponsoring a failed resolution that would have called on the administration to exhaust all diplomatic options. Biden always favors exhausting all diplomatic options—chatter, after all, is inexhaustible, a proposition the loquacious senator often is at pains to prove. The resolution was a bid for wiggle room—take credit for success but second-guess if things get tough before that "decade after" rolls around. Still, as the March 2003 invasion neared, Biden was adamant: "The choice between war and peace is Saddam's. The choice between relevance and irrelevance is the U.N. Security Council's."

POLICY OF CONVENIENCE

For all Biden's twaddle about doctrines and concepts, there is a simple technique for divining this foreign-policy solon's bobs and weaves: Consult the polls and the calendar. His opposition to the Gulf War was an example of Democrats' post-Vietnam squeamishness about military actions abroad. His 1998 hawkishness dovetailed with growing public anger after the U.S. embassies in East Africa were bombed by bin Laden, in whose activities the Clinton administration suggested Iraq was complicit. Post-9/11, Biden was a top adviser to Senator Kerry's campaign. Convinced that Democrats could not win unless the public believed they took national security seriously, he pushed his reluctant candidate to talk tougher. Over time, Iraq became more difficult and the expected caches of WMD failed to materialize, but as long as the mission enjoyed public support, Biden maintained that Saddam had been both a long- and a short-term threat to the United States, as well as an "extreme danger to the world." Even a year after the 2004 election—which, the senator told the *The New Yorker*'s Jeffrey Goldberg, the Democrats lost because voters decided Bush was strong and Kerry weak—Biden declared, "The decision to go to war was the right one." The ensuing problems, he elaborated, stemmed from the conduct of the mission, not the mission itself.

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But change, we now know, was in the air. Howard Dean, who had risen from the fever swamps to the cusp of wresting the nomination from Kerry, was elected chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Biden was eyeing a presidential run of his own. Though he scoffed that "no goddam chairman's ever made a difference in the history of the Democratic party," Biden couldn't help but appreciate the declaration of MoveOn.org's Eli Pariser: "It's our party. We bought it, we own it, and we're going to take it back." He couldn't help but notice the elevation of Barack Obama. By the fortuity of not being in the Senate in 2002, Obama had been spared the need to cover himself and his party with a vote for war. As an inconsequential state legislator from an ultra-Left Chicago district, Obama could afford to oppose the invasion of Iraq. And now that opposition was gaining him traction.

The result was a one-eighty that would have been comical if the stakes hadn't been so high. The Foreign Relations chairman turned against the war with a vengeance, clinging to the bogus narrative that congressional Democrats had been gulled by the administration's "manipulation of intelligence"—intelligence Biden had reviewed himself. Biden characterized that intelligence as worthless because of Saddam's duplicity, and superfluous because "everyone in the world thought [Saddam] had [WMD]. The weapons inspectors said he had them." After years

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of calling for a surge in U.S. forces to quell the post-invasion insurgency, Biden bitterly opposed the surge once Bush ordered it in late 2006—when the Democrats' presidential debates were on the horizon. At a January 2007 hearing, he thundered: "Why do we want to stop the surge? We don't agree with the mission." Of course "the mission," defeating al-Qaeda and securing Iraq for "the long haul," was the same one Biden had championed for years.

With this transformation, Biden has managed an unlikely feat: He has been just as wrong about Iraq this time around as he was in 1991. Though Biden maintained that the surge would fail ("Sending additional troops to Baghdad will place more Americans in harm's way with little prospect for success"), even Obama today grudgingly concedes it has "succeeded beyond our wildest dreams."

With similar gloom, Biden predicted the 2005 Iraqi elections were "going to be ugly," marred by violence. Instead they went off smoothly. By late 2006, Biden concluded that Sunni-dominated Anbar province had "morphed into an indigenous jihadist movement" and that "no number of troops can solve the sectarian problem and we don't have enough troops to definitively deal with the jihadist threat." In reality, the jihadist movement was not indigenous and, bolstered by the surge's modest increase in U.S. forces, Anbaris rejected al-Qaeda. Anbar is now one of the war's greatest triumphs: The enemy has been vanquished and control of the province has just been turned over to the Iraqi government.

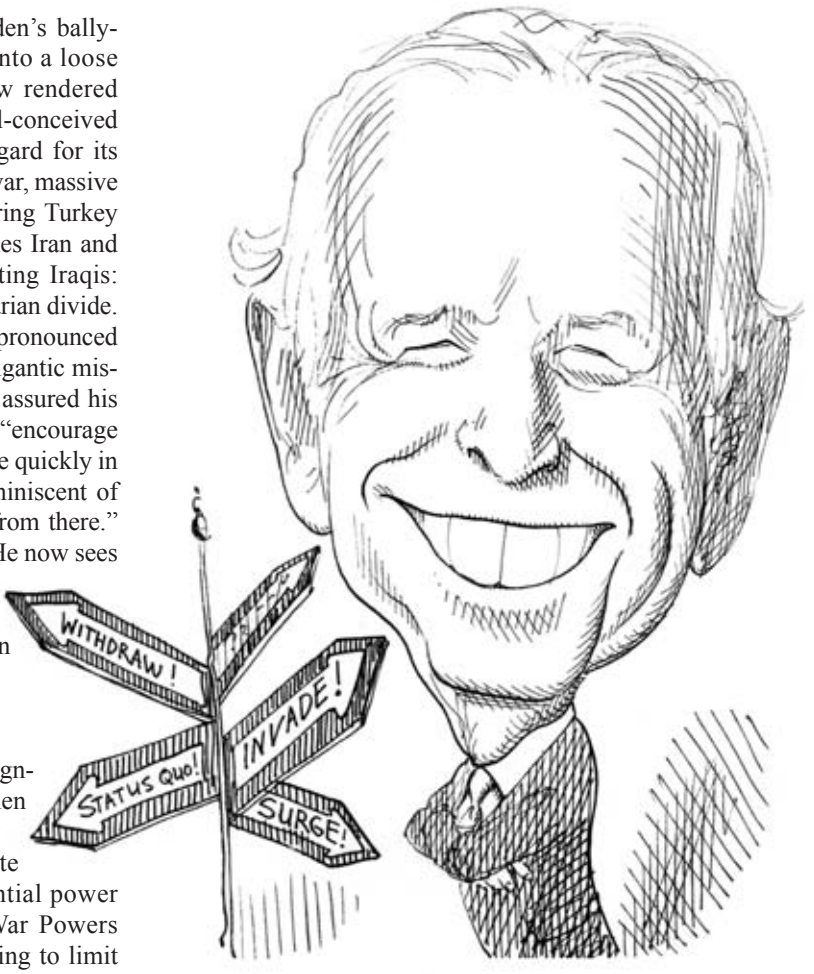
These developments underscore the folly of Biden's ballyhooed 2006 proposal for a soft partition of Iraq into a loose federation of three ethno-sectarian enclaves. Now rendered irrelevant by events, the gambit—premised on an ill-conceived understanding of Iraq's demographics and a disregard for its constitution—promised a chaotic descent into civil war, massive population displacements, and the possibility of luring Turkey and Saudi Arabia into a conflict that already includes Iran and Syria. Biden's plan did succeed, however, in uniting Iraqis: Revulsion for the proposal cut across the ethno-sectarian divide.

And now, the dénouement. Well into 2005, Biden pronounced that timetables for a U.S. withdrawal would be a "gigantic mistake." The imposition of arbitrary deadlines, Biden assured his fellow experts at the Brookings Institution, would "encourage our enemies to wait us out," cause Iraq to "degenerate quickly in the sectarian violence," and result in a debacle reminiscent of "Lebanon in 1985, and God knows where it goes from there." But—surprise!—Biden then had another epiphany. He now sees the wisdom of withdrawal timelines, such as those urged by his running mate, whom he previously dismissed as too green for the heady arena of foreign affairs.

SOVEREIGNTY DIMINISHED

Iraq is a synecdoche for Biden's career as a foreign-policy guru. He entered the Senate 35 years ago, when he was all of three years removed from Syracuse law school. In 1973 he took his place in the Watergate Congress, the most liberal and hostile to presidential power in the nation's history. Democrats enacted the War Powers Resolution over a weakened Nixon's veto, purporting to limit the commander-in-chief's authority over the armed forces; they defunded the Vietnam War effort, ensuring U.S. defeat and the carnage that followed it; and they passed the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, transferring control of foreign intelligence from the president to the courts.

Biden evolved into an internationalist of the highest order. He is probably the Senate's most ardent admirer of the United Nations, regardless of how ineptly and corruptly it performs. He has never met a multilateral treaty he didn't like, no matter how much sovereignty it surrendered. He vigorously supports the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which directs states to "modify social and cultural patterns of conduct" and installs the government as paymaster to enforce equal compensation for jobs of comparable value. He urges ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which vests children with a right to receive and impart "information and ideas of all kinds" over any "media of the child's choice"—without regard to age or parental consent. He wants the U.S. to accept the International Criminal Court, which purports to empower an independent prosecutor to bring war-crimes charges against nationals of any country—including ours—whether it has ratified the treaty or not. Like McCain, he has been a supporter of the Law of the Sea Treaty, a redistributionist scheme that creates its own mini-U.N. (the supervisory "Authority") as well as a new international legal tribunal, the rulings of which would inevitably interfere with American



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naval operations and national security. As for the economy-wrecking Kyoto global-warming compact, Biden thinks the U.S. must "re-engage," since "the very survival of the planet depends upon it." McCain supports a less restrictive approach based on U.S. law rather than international conventions.

Furthermore, Biden has already attempted—so far unsuccessfully—to address his running mate's shortage of legislative accomplishment by rushing Obama's proposed "Global Poverty Act" through his committee. This monstrosity of a law would require the U.S. to commit 0.7 percent of its gross national product through 2015 to foreign aid. The 0.7 percent figure is rooted in an oft-repeated and usually ignored aspiration spelled out in a 1970 U.N. General Assembly resolution; the 2015 target was set by international bureaucrats at the U.N.'s "Millennium Summit" in 2000. The effect would be to skyrocket U.S. largesse from its current annual level of about $21 billion (the world's most generous) to a whopping $85 billion. As described by U.N. adviser Jeffrey Sachs, the Millennium Project anticipates that the total transfer—$845 billion by 2015—would have to be raised by "a global tax, preferably on carbon-emitting fossil fuels."

PARTY VS. PRINCIPLE

Biden is first and foremost a combative partisan, but he modulates his left-wing orientation in accordance with public opinion, following the polls slavishly when exigencies like 9/11 arise.

When a Democrat is in the White House, Biden's internationalist moralism proves remarkably flexible. During the Carter administration, Biden's easy cynicism made an impression on the Soviets. When Biden traveled to Moscow in 1979 for discussions about the SALT II treaty, Vadim Zagladin, deputy head of the Central Committee's International Department, noted in a memo (later obtained by the dissident Vladimir Bukovsky) that Biden and his companion, Sen. Richard Lugar, had not raised human-rights concerns—the duo said they didn't wish "to spoil the atmosphere with problems which are bound to cause distrust in our relations." "Unofficially," Zagladin recounted, the senators "were not so much concerned with solving a problem of this or that particular citizen as with showing to the American public that they do care for 'human rights.' . . . In other words, the collocutors directly admitted that what is happening is a kind of a show, that they absolutely don't care for the fate of most so-called dissidents."

During the Clinton administration, suspected terrorists were periodically captured for extraordinary rendition, the FBI conducted warrantless searches for national-security purposes, and the president launched military incursions without congressional warrant or U.N. approval. Biden remained a steadfast supporter of U.S. intervention abroad. Like McCain, he not only called for arming the Bosnian Muslims but wanted U.S. ground forces to be deployed under NATO against the Serbs in Kosovo, an option opposed by most Republicans as unrelated to vital national interests and ultimately rejected by Clinton.

In contrast, Biden fights Republican administrations tooth and nail, broadly construing the ever-expanding web of statutes, regulations, court decisions, treaties, and customary international law in order to accuse his ideological adversaries of all manner of perfidy. He opposed President Reagan's anti-Communist efforts in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Angola while battling the Reagan defense buildup and the Strategic Defense Initiative. That is to say, after helping ensure defeat in Vietnam, Biden risked defeat in the Cold War before courting defeat in Iraq. In the Bush administration, Biden voted with his party to block reauthorization of key Patriot Act provisions until Democrats, with an eye on the midterm elections, relented in March 2006. He opposed surveillance reform (legal authorization for U.S. intelligence agencies to monitor foreign enemies outside the U.S.) because it granted immunity to the telecommunications companies that had helped our spies eavesdrop without warrants on suspected international terrorists after 9/11.

Biden also objected to the president's 2002 withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. He claimed the administration could not validly invoke the clause permitting withdrawal due to "extraordinary events," and that "no new enemy has fielded an ICBM missile, which is the only missile our national missile defense is intended to stop." Leaving aside the extraordinary events of the 9/11 attacks, the fact that North Korea and Iran were already known to be pursuing intercontinental ballistic missiles, and the fact that ICBMs are not the only missiles our defense is designed to stop, it happens that the Soviet Union, the only other party to the bilateral ABM treaty, no longer exists.

THE CHECK'S IN THE MAIL, TO TEHRAN

Finally, were it not for the national spotlight on his Iraq farrago, Biden would be best known for his relentless appeasement of Iran, the world's leading sponsor of jihadist terror. Along with top members of Clinton's inner circle, Biden was in the vanguard of foreign-affairs "engagement" enthusiasts who got goo-goo eyes in 1997 when the Islamic Republic's then-president, Mohammed Khatami, proposed a "dialogue between civilizations." The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps had only recently assisted Hezbollah in bombing the Khobar Towers complex in Saudi Arabia, murdering 19 members of the U.S. Air Force. And Iran was busily pursuing its nuclear aspirations. Still, as American Enterprise Institute scholar Michael Rubin recounts, Biden stubbornly pushed for cultivating Iranian "reformers" and encouraging trade and dialogue to bring the mullahs around. The European Union followed just such advice, increasing trade threefold with Iran, which promptly diverted 70 percent of the haul to its military and nuclear programs. The mullahs responded to this sensitive diplomacy by installing as their president a hardliner, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who is more clearly reflective of the "Death to America" philosophy.

As the Iranians laughed all the way to the bank and continued killing Americans in Iraq, Congress voted last year to designate the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps a terrorist organization, a move that imposes economic sanctions. Only 22 senators opposed that designation; Biden and Obama were prominent among them. That called to mind the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. As policymakers considered potential responses to the attacks, Biden had a brainstorm. "Seems to me," he told Foreign Relations staffers, that "this would be a good time to send, no strings attached, a check for $200 million to Iran."

Governor Palin must admit: She doesn't have the foreign-policy background to come up with something like *that*. **NR**

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Sun./Nov. 9	AT SEA			morning/afternoon seminars
Mon./Nov. 10	Grand Turk,	7:00AM	3:00PM	afternoon seminar late-night smoker
Tue./Nov. 11	San Juan, Puerto Rico	10:00AM	11:00PM	
Wed./Nov. 12	St. Thomas, USVI	8:00AM	5:00PM	evening cocktail reception
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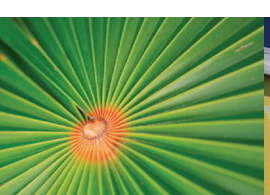
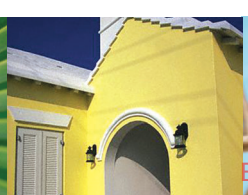

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■ 2008 VIII

Losing by Losing

If the Democrat wins, there will be few silver linings

RAMESH PONNURU

If John McCain wins the election, he should send Rahm Emanuel a thank-you note. If the congressman had not succeeded in engineering a Democratic takeover of Capitol Hill in 2006, McCain would have very little shot at winning the presidency.

Instead, he would be running to extend Republican dominance of a sour and angry country. The argument about drilling would be playing out very differently. High gas prices would still make energy policy the top issue in the election, but if Republicans had narrow majorities in Congress, they would be responsible for doing something about it—and they probably would not have the strength to pass a bill. Precisely because they cannot do much about it now, it is, paradoxically, easier for them to get a hearing for their argument, and thus move public opinion.

The success of the surge has made the Iraq War less of a liability for Republicans than it was in 2006. But would it have happened if Republican majorities had survived in that year's elections? Nervous congressional Republicans would still have had something to lose, so they would have cautioned against the initially unpopular policy. The Democrats would have faced fewer constraints in opposing it. The combination of a small, scared majority and a bold, irresponsible minority would probably have stopped the surge before it began. Progress in Iraq would have been much less likely, and a Republican defeat in the 2008 presidential race much more likely.

So political parties are sometimes lucky to lose elections. Would Republicans be lucky to lose the presidency in 2008? About once a week, I hear a Republican argue for that proposition. Sometimes the argument is made by a congressman, or somebody who works for one. They figure that they might be able to take control of the House in 2010 if Obama wins this year: Voters normally turn on the party in charge of the White House during midterm elections. Sometimes it is made by people who are unhappy with McCain or dissatisfied with the direction of the party: They think that it needs more punishment for its sins and that their vision for it would prevail after a big defeat. Some Republicans say they will sit out the election, withhold their contributions, or even vote for Obama in furtherance of these long-term goals.

By the same token, it is said that a McCain victory this year could well lead to Republican losses in 2010 and 2012. President McCain would not see strengthening the Republican party as part of his job, and he would govern with congressional Democrats in a way that would weaken it. Also, no party has held the White House for more than twelve years in a row since Harry Truman left office in 1953. McCain would have to pull off a massive and highly unlikely realignment for the 2012 election to be winnable.

So which is more important? The national election this November, or the next two? These things can be hard to judge even in retrospect. Republican defeat at the presidential level in 1992 led to the Republican takeover of Congress two years later, and thus to welfare reform, a halt in defense cuts, and a capital-gains tax cut. But the 1992 defeat also led to years of weakness in foreign policy, higher income-tax rates that have still not been entirely reversed, and the appointment of two liberal justices to the Supreme Court.

NO WIN, UNCERTAIN FUTURE

My vote is for 2008 as the most important upcoming election. Foreign policy is the first reason. As the last two years of the Bush administration have shown, a president, even an unpopular one, can drive foreign policy, even if an opposition fiercely opposed to his policy controls Congress. So a Republican congressional victory in 2010 would not undo the damage of an Obama victory in 2008. The resulting Congress would probably have even less effect on Obama than Speaker Pelosi has had on Bush; it's harder to make a president act than to stop him from acting.

While there may be more to Obama than the parody of foreign-policy liberalism he appears to be, in several telling episodes he has come across as weak and uncertain. During a Democratic debate, he pledged to meet with foreign dictators without precondition. Then he tried to elevate this debate tactic into something approaching a doctrine, and still later, after a backlash, he tried to modify his pledge into nothingness. I suspect his actual instincts were on display in the first two acts of this production. Negotiations with our enemies can under some circumstances be useful, but they are not goods in themselves. Like Clinton before him, Obama gives the impression of thinking that there is no problem his glibness cannot solve.

Or take his response to the Russo–Georgian conflict. Initially he urged the countries, like squabbling children, to get along. Even when he got tougher with Russia, he suggested that our violation of Saddam Hussein's sovereignty over Iraq had paved the way for Russia's action. Such naïve legalism would be counterproductive at this unstable moment in global politics, and McCain would bring less of it to the table than Obama.

My second reason is judges. Supreme Court justice John Paul Stevens is 88; Ruth Bader Ginsburg is 75. Surely both would retire in order to let President Obama extend their liberal activism for several decades. David Souter, 69, might also retire. Don't count on Republican senators, who are certain to be in the minority, to block even Obama's most egregious nominees; almost all Republican senators voted for Bill Clinton's Supreme Court picks (Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer) in 1993 and 1994. Over the last few years, moreover, almost all Republican senators have gone on record saying that it is unconstitutional (or otherwise seriously wrong) to filibuster against judicial nominees.

In both these cases, a liberal would replace a liberal. But Justice Antonin Scalia is 72. So is Justice Anthony Kennedy. As unreliable a constitutionalist as he has been, Obama could find someone less reliable. Even if Obama merely kept the current liberal-conservative balance, *Roe* v. *Wade* would stay on the books for another generation. If he tilted it farther leftward, the Court would surely invent a constitutional right to same-sex marriage, reinvent one to partial-birth abortion, and make the death

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penalty a dead letter. And then: Mandatory voting rights for felons? A right to euthanasia? The possibilities might not be limitless, but they would not be limited by the Constitution.

A Republican sweep in 2012, assuming it happened, would undo almost none of the damage. Even a dozen years of conservative appointments to the Court might not undo it. None of the major activist precedents of the Warren Court has been reversed.

Many conservatives worry about the judges McCain would appoint, and note, correctly, that some of the worst liberal activists of the last half century have been appointed by Republican presidents. But Republicans have had a higher success rate with their appointees as the conservative legal movement has gained experience. In the Senate, McCain has compiled a solid record on judges, having voted to confirm each Republican conservative and raised objections to several of the liberals. His decision in 2005 to compromise with the Democrats on the rules for filibustering Bush's judicial nominees may have been a mistake (as I think), but it does not give us any reason to believe that he secretly wants a liberal judiciary.

McCain may pick the wrong nominee, as Reagan sometimes did and any Republican might, or he may cut a bad deal with Senate Democrats. If so, it would mean only that some of his appointees turned out by accident to be as liberal as all of Obama's would be by design. Only one Democratic appointee of the last half century, Byron White, has *not* been a reliable liberal activist.

The third reason is health care. As James Capretta has pointed out in these pages (September 1), Obama's health-care plan is designed to evolve into a national health-insurance program along the lines of Canada's. The resulting government monopoly or near-monopoly on health insurance would stifle innovation, require bureaucratic rationing, and infringe on freedom. But it would also move American politics permanently leftward.

When I have made this point before, left-wing writers—for example, Paul Krugman—have misunderstood it. They take me to be saying that national health care would be so successful that a grateful populace would give up its prejudices against big government. Not exactly. I have three other dynamics in mind.

First, the inevitable disappointments and failures of a nationalized system would just as inevitably be blamed on underfunding, creating a bidding war that liberals would usually win. On those occasions when voters understood that spending had to be controlled, they would prefer that liberals control it, so as to do the bare minimum necessary.

Second, the creation of a new health-care regime would alter the incentives for all the interest groups involved. In the short run, at least, squeezing money out of the government system would be more advantageous than abolishing it.

Third, the creation of a new system would make free-market alternatives look more radical to the public than they do now, because they would be more radical. The public's aversion to risk, which now hurts advocates of liberal policies as much as it helps them, would only help them.

So national health insurance could be a lasting political success for liberals even if it is a colossal policy failure; it could, indeed, succeed politically *because* of its failures. Liberals believe, correctly, that 2009 will be their best chance yet to get their way on health care. No domestic issue would be more important to a President Obama, and he would have a large Senate majority to work with.

Three other considerations make defeat this year look especially unattractive. First: You can't be sure that Obama would fail politically. He may inherit an economy that is recovering from a mid-boom slowdown. He may be able to preside over victory in Iraq.

Second: Those disaffected Republicans who hope that the party will move their way in defeat may be mistaken. Some of them must be, since they do not agree among themselves on what has gone wrong to date or what should be done in the future.

Third: The Senate looks especially bleak for conservatives over the next four years. Democrats are likely to pick up around five seats this year. In 2010, Republicans will have to defend 19 of the 34 seats up for election. Not until 2012 will Republicans have a real chance to regain ground. If we must have a liberal president, conservatives should prefer one who will have modest Democratic majorities from 2013 to 2017 to one with big ones from 2009 to 2013.

Conservatives who are tempted to sit this election out, or worse, on the theory that they can "win by losing" should think again. Better to win today. **NR**

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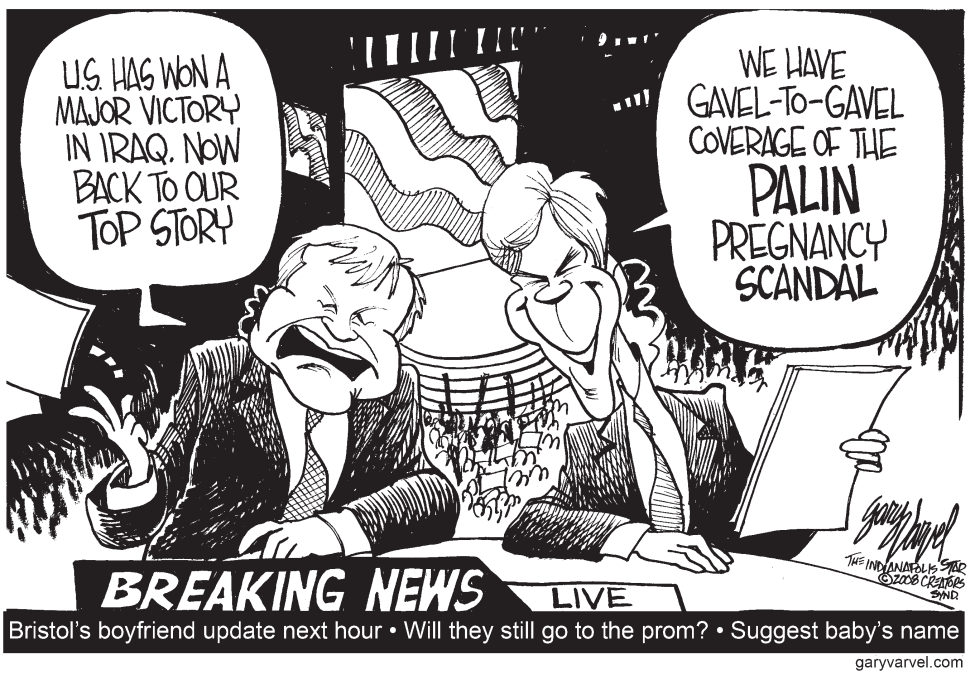
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To see full-color, detailed photographs of the four-coin White House Collection and the two-coin Collection, obtain details of the charitable activities and support for military veterans' families the sale of these Collectibles makes possible, read the amazing story of the coins, and see and hear from people who own these Collectibles – and, of course, to order yours… go to www.giftsforpatriots21.com.....where you'll be welcomed personally by Lee Greenwood. (Or you may order by phone at 877-446-6341.)

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the long view

ROB LONG

Recommended for parents of girls, from the Young Adult bookshelf:

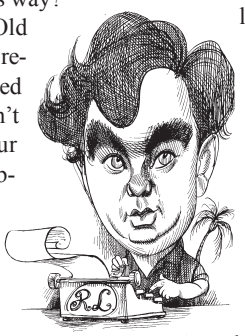
THRILLING TALES OF ACTION AND ADVENTURE FOR GIRLS AGES 8 TO 12

The Chattering Skull

With Girl Guide Sarah Palin and Old Doc McCain

EXCERPT:

Sarah brushed away the cobwebs with her machete. "Gee, Doc," she said to the old doctor, "these old Senate offices sure are creepy! I'm sure glad I wore my high leather boots! Are you sure that the chattering skull that's terrifying the town is this way?"



"Sarah, Sarah," chuckled Old Doc McCain indulgently as he removed his pith helmet and wiped his ancient, wrinkled brow. "Don't you know that cobwebs are our friends? Why, these very cobwebs that you find so 'creepy' tell us exactly where to look! Well, here we are: Joe Biden's office. Just where I said it would be."

Sarah smiled at the old, old man. He really was quite a guy, Sarah thought to herself. If only he weren't so . . . gullible. He meant well, of course, but if she hadn't been around during the *Adventure of the Border Fence* or the *North Shore Drill Site Escapade*, he might not have made it out alive.

Sarah cocked an ear to one of the old, spooky doors. Her hearing was first-rate. Inside the old, cobwebbed offices, she could hear something. Something terrifying.

The chattering skull!

Sarah put her finger to her lips. Old Doc McCain instantly fell silent. "I think the chattering skull is inside Joe Biden's office," she whispered to the elderly gentleman. He nodded. "It may be worse than I thought," he whispered back. "The chattering skull may be Joe Biden himself!"

Sarah raised her machete, and with a bloodcurdling holler kicked in the door.

And there it was! *The chattering skull!*

SOCIAL- AND FRIENDSHIP-SKILLS LEARNING FOR TWEEN AND TEEN GIRLS

The Stuck-Up Crowd

With Sarah Palin and Coach Big John McCain

EXCERPT:

"I know I shouldn't care what those stuck-up rich kids say about me," Sarah Palin, star point guard of the Wasilla High School basketball team, said as she slumped into the chair in Coach's office. "But why do they have to be so *mean*?"

Big, fat tears appeared in Sarah's eyes.

Old Coach Big John McCain looked across his desk at his MVP. She had played well in that night's game—heck, she had scored most of the points—but still, the mean crowd hadn't given her any credit. The cheerleaders had offered only the most lukewarm cheers, and the rich girls in the stands—the ones with the imported cars and the wealthy parents—refused to clap for her excellent free throws and three-pointers.

"Hey, kiddo," Coach growled. "You want sympathy, get a dog."

Sarah looked up.

"Seriously, girl. What do you want? A pity party? Well, I'm too old and broken down to throw one for you. So I'll just tell you this: Some of those girls can be awfully mean, and awfully petty, and awfully spoiled. Do you really want to be their friend?"

"Well . . ." said Sarah, uncertain.

"Do you? Do you really want to ride around in Sally Quinn's Volvo?"

"Maybe just one time?" Sarah said, timidly. But she knew the ancient coach was right.

"Get up off that chair and do what you do best. Play basketball. Play your heart out. Be the kind of player that they *can't* ignore. Deal?"

Sarah's smile was wide, and her teeth flashed happily.

"Gosh, Coach, thanks!" she said.

"Oh, and Sarah?" the old, old coach called out, as Sarah headed to the locker room. "Every now and then, throw an elbow!"

Coach smiled his yellowed smile, and Sarah tossed her head back and laughed. Everything was going to be all right!

ADOLESCENT ISSUES AND SEXUALITY FOR EARLY-TEEN GIRLS

Are You There, God? It's Me, Sarah

EXCERPT:

"I . . . I . . . I think I may be pregnant," Sarah's friend stammered out. "I don't know what to do, or who to talk to about it. Sarah, you're my only friend!"

Sarah Palin leaned against the window of the ice-cream parlor. It was hard for her to believe. Just a few years ago, she and her friend were sharing mooseburgers and confessing secrets in their diaries. But now? Holy cow! One of them was pregnant?

"Have you told your boyfriend?" she asked.

Her friend shook her head. "I've been too afraid to," she said, her bottom lip trembling.

"Well, we're going to fix that *right now!*" cried Sarah, grabbing her friend by the wrist, and the two of them hopped into Sarah's pickup truck.

MAKING HISTORY COME ALIVE FOR GIRLS AGES 8 TO 12

We Were There: The Weather Underground Tries to Blow up the Capitol!

A "SaraDventure" Series!

EXCERPT:

"Run!" shouted Sarah at the old man in the walker. "Run!"

"Well, slow down, missy," muttered the decrepit old geezer. He shuffled along the sidewalk in his slippers, unable to keep up with the sprightly, energetic high-school athlete.

"But the hippies are trying to blow up the Capitol building!" Sarah shouted. "And one of them's a friend of Barack Obama's! Run! Run, old man, run!"

But the old man stumbled. He fell to the ground with an alarming thump.

"You go, Sarah. You go on. Leave me here," he muttered. "Leave me here."

"No way, Old Timer," Sarah called out defiantly. "We're going to save the Capitol building and thwart the hippies' plot, as a *team!*"

And with that, she lifted up the fragile old frame of her companion, slumped him over her broad shoulders, and raced on.

"Watch out, hippies!" she hollered. "We're a-comin' to gitcha!"

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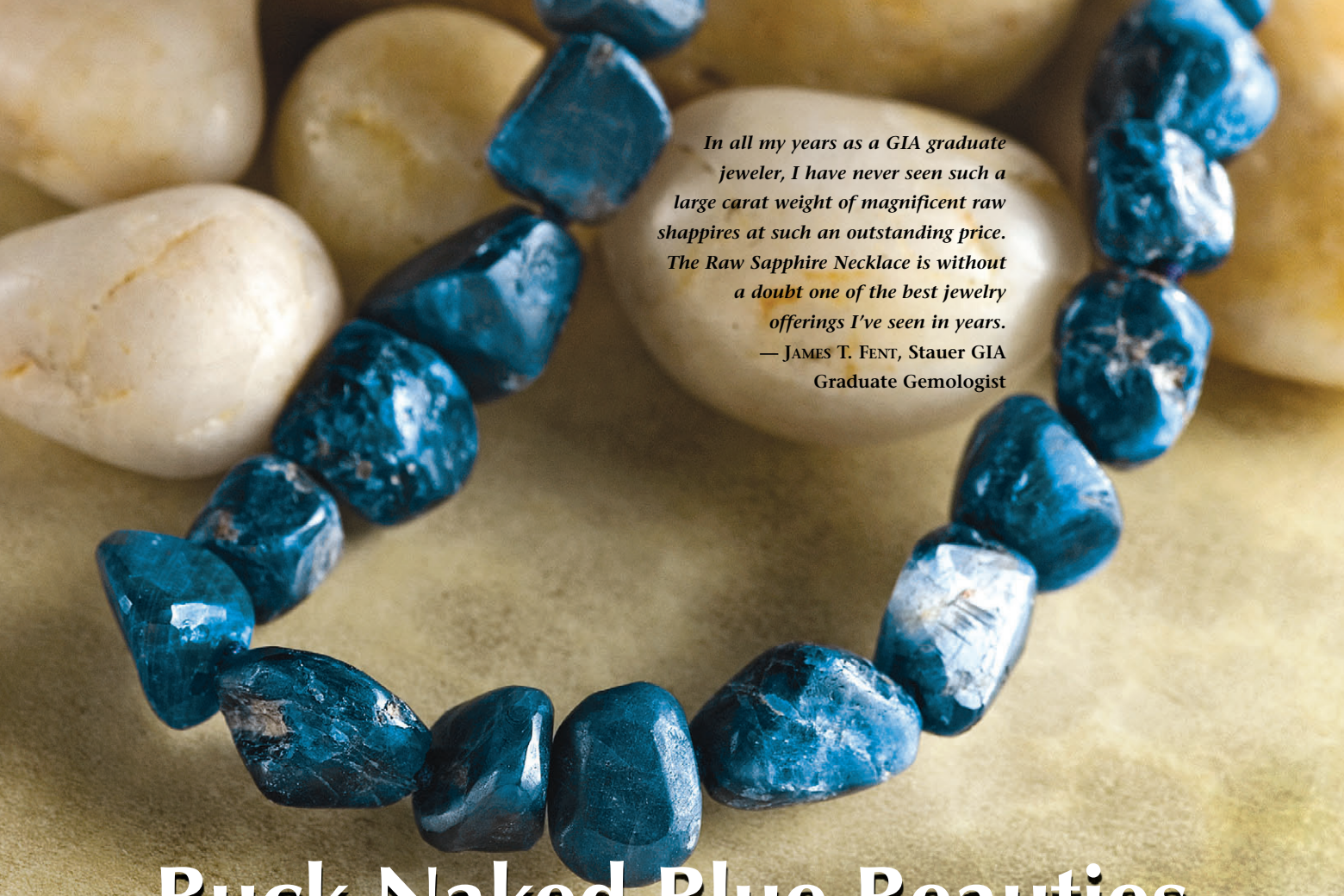

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— James T. Fent, Stauer GIA Graduate Gemologist

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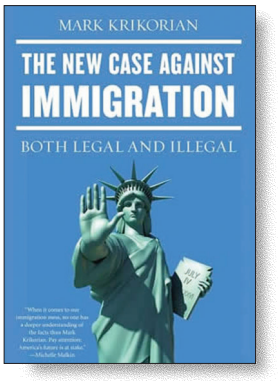
But Shall It Prevail?



The New Case Against Immigration: Both Legal and Illegal, by Mark Krikorian (Sentinel, 304 pp., $25.95)

JOHN O'SULLIVAN

Our modern debate on immigration, which began in the early 1990s after 30 years of largely unquestioned orthodoxy, has been a lopsided affair. Let's begin with the fact that immigration is one of those issues on which the nation's elites are overwhelmingly on one side and most Americans on the other. This picture emerges from all the polling data: Take, for example, the 2002 study conducted for the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations comparing the opinions of 2,800 randomly selected Americans with those of 400 political, business, religious, cultural, and other "leaders." Among much else of interest, it found that while 60 percent of Americans felt that the then-current level of immigration was a "critical threat to the vital interests of the United States," only 14 percent of America's leaders shared that view. Not surprisingly, 55 percent of Americans said they wanted immigration reduced. Only 18 percent of our betters felt the same; 60 percent of them liked the current level just fine. Disparities between elite and popular opinion on questions about *illegal* immigration were still greater. And the elite/popular gap was greater on immigration than on any other topic.

Presented with these figures, an intelligent foreigner—say, a graduate of one of France's *grandes écoles*—might expect that any immigration debate would be a long, patient, and serious intellectual campaign by political and business elites to persuade the people that immigration's benefits to America far outweigh its costs. But little of the kind has occurred: Indeed, almost all the serious intellectual arguments have been presented by the so-called restrictionists.

When "comprehensive" immigration bills (with momentous potential consequences) were presented to Congress in 2006 and 2007, their congressional sponsors sought to avoid debate altogether. It was opponents of the legislation, such as Alabama senator Jeff Sessions in Congress and Robert Rector outside it, who produced detailed estimates of its economic and social costs. Talk radio reported this one-sided debate accurately. Massive popular opposition to "comprehensive" reform built up. Twice, the elites had to back off.

These two defeats underlined the nature of recent immigration debates in general: They were elite attempts to override popular opinion without persuading it. Assuming their own moral superiority to the "nativist" masses, our elites feel no need to master facts and arguments. So, instead of a genuine debate on immigration, we get this kind of stilted theater:

First Orator: "Immigration benefits Americans economically." (Applause.)

Second Orator: "Not really. Almost all the economic benefits of immigration go to the immigrants. Any benefit to native-born Americans as a whole is trivial if it exists at all. But mass immigration benefits some Americans, mainly upper-income ones, while harming others, mainly low-paid workers." (Audience unease, cries of "Shame!")

First Orator: "Er, my opponent has just admitted that immigration benefits Americans economically. Also, did I mention that America is a nation of immigrants?" (Loud and prolonged applause.)

Recent books about immigration show a similar disparity. With a few exceptions—mainly sympathetic accounts of the immigrant experience—they have been largely hostile to "open borders" ideology. Authors such as Victor Davis Hanson, Roy Beck, John Fonte, Heather Mac Donald, and George Borjas have written freshly but also critically on the need to reconsider our post-1965 immigration policy as its mixed consequences play out.

Three books in particular stand out as shaping the modern debate. Peter Brimelow's *Alien Nation* (1995), born from a 1992 National Review article, restarted it by pointing out that the supposed net economic benefits of immigration were mythical. Samuel Huntington's *Who Are We?* (2004) analyzed mass immigration as one solvent in the dissolution of America's national identity. And now Mark Krikorian's *New Case Against Immigration*, though it restates some older arguments, mounts a largely original and wholly ingenious case.

Recent immigration debates were basically elite attempts to override popular opinion without persuading it.

To be sure, the book's subtitle, "Both Legal and Illegal," is bold rather than original. Politicians have until now preferred to focus on illegal immigration because, well, in the words of Rep. Sonny Bono, "What can I say, it's *illegal*." Thus the case against it is all but self-evident. Illegal immigration and the quasi-official U.S. policy of turning a blind eye to it serve to undermine the rule of law, penalize those waiting in line for visas, and encourage the growth of a black economy.

But many ill consequences of mass illegal immigration apply to mass legal immigration too. If large numbers of unskilled immigrants seeking low-paying jobs suddenly arrive in the U.S. labor market, their arrival will drive down the wages of such jobs, whether they live here legally, overstayed their visas illegally, or crossed the border in the trunk of a car. In emphasizing that legality is only one—and not the most important—aspect of immigration, Krikorian closes a loophole that too many

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AS HEARD ON PAUL HARVEY NEWS

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Unlike other heating sources, the EdenPURE® cannot put poisonous carbon monoxide into a room or any type of fumes or any type of harmful radiation.

Q. What is the origin of this amazing heating element in the EdenPURE®?

A. This advanced heating element was discovered accidentally by a man named John Jones.

Q. What advantages does infrared quartz tube heating source have over other heating source products?

A. John Jones designed his heating source around the three most important consumer benefits: economy, comfort, and safety.

In the EdenPURE® system, electricity is used to generate infrared light which, in turn, creates a very safe heat.

Never be cold again

Cannot start a fire; a child or animal can touch or sit on it without harm

After a great deal of research and development, very efficient infrared heat chambers were developed that utilize three unique patented solid copper heat exchangers in one EdenPURE® heater.

Q. How can a person cut their heating bill by up to 50% with the EdenPURE®?

A. The EdenPURE® will heat a room in minutes. Therefore, you can turn the heat down in your house to as low as 50 degrees, but the room you are occupying, which has the EdenPURE®, will be warm and comfortable. The EdenPURE® is portable. When you move to another room, it will quickly heat that room also. This can drastically cut heating bills, in some instances, by up to 50%.

The EdenPURE® comes in 2 models. GEN3 Model 500 heats a room up to 300 square feet and GEN3 Model 1000 heats a room up to 1,000 square feet.

End of interview.

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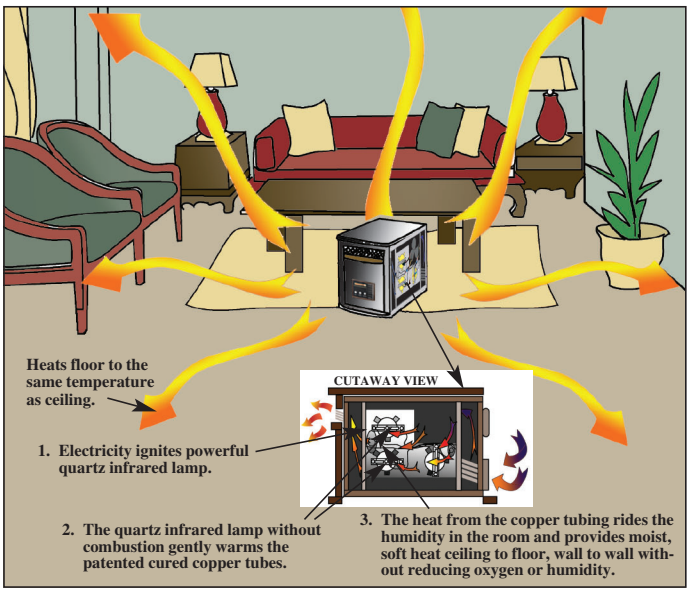
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politicians, including prominent conservatives, have scampered through.

Where Krikorian stakes out new ground is in his emphasis on what has changed to make mass immigration no longer an asset to America. It is not the immigrants who are different (or whose difference matters), he argues, but we ourselves.

America today is not the America that benefited from the "Great Wave" of immigration from the 1880s to the 1920s. It is less agricultural, less industrial, more educated, more advanced scientifically, longer-living, better collectively provided for in sickness and old age, more heavily taxed, richer, more concerned about poverty, more middle-class, more conscious of the environment, and less separated culturally and economically from other countries. These are vast differences—with vast consequences. America at the start of the 20th century needed millions of poor immigrants to sustain and advance the agriculture and fast-growing industrial economy of a rural and blue-collar nation. Today millions of poor arrivals from early industrial and even pre-modern societies arrive in a post-industrial economy with the middle-class standards of the 21st century. This mismatch both restricts opportunities for the immigrants and imposes serious strains and costs on America's society and economy.

What are we to make of this argument? One might suspect that Krikorian chose this approach because it is rhetorically shrewd. Americans of all political stripes dislike any stigmatizing of groups, especially poor people or minorities. Most immigrants today fall into both categories—and those who don't (like me, a British expat) tend to be regarded as not really immigrants. Hence a policy that "blames" Americans rather than immigrants for the need to reduce immigration is likely to be more persuasive to today's kinder, gentler America.

But that doesn't make the argument false. Krikorian demonstrates with a wealth of detailed research that mass immigration has damaging effects on matters as diverse as national security and automation. These three effects, however, are fundamental:

First, it retards the assimilation of immigrants already here, helps our post-national elites to smash a "melting pot" they now regard as atavistic and discriminatory, and undermines both America's national identity (rooted in its common culture) and its sovereignty. All of this, in turn, spreads social distrust both between groups and, as the liberal-minded social scientist Robert Putnam reluctantly found, even *within* groups, including native-born Americans. It thereby weakens the habits of informal social cooperation that Tocqueville identified as a distinctive virtue of American civilization.

Unless we curb present levels of mass immigration, Americans are likely to live in a more conflict-ridden, less cooperative, less advanced, more unequal, higher-taxed, and more government-heavy society.

Second, it obstructs the introduction of labor-saving technology, since cheap labor is readily available through mass immigration. This, in turn, holds down productivity, slows down per capita income increases, and inhibits the spread of middle-class living standards. The net effect is greater social inequality: America morphs from a social structure built on a mass middle class to one where the middle class shrinks between growing numbers of rich and poor.

Third, mass immigration—because it is, in effect, a policy of importing poverty—overstrains government services from Medicare to education even as it hikes the tax burden. Innumerable studies show, for instance, that immigrants and their children account for most of the rise in those lacking health insurance. Hospitals across America have been closing their accident and emergency departments in order to avoid the bankruptcy caused by having to treat such patients. Hence one result of mass immigration—a result likely to horrify its libertarian supporters—will likely be some form of socialized medicine. But the additional taxation paid by immigrant workers will not equal the costs they impose for about 300 years.

All in all, Krikorian establishes his argument: Unless we curb present levels of mass immigration, Americans are likely to live in a more conflict-ridden, less cooperative, less advanced, more unequal, higher-taxed, and more government-heavy society. His well-researched and well-argued book would transform the national debate in a sane world. Will it do so in reality? Its largely respectful reviews suggest that prospects are improving but still not bright.

Two reviews—Peter Skerry's in *The Weekly Standard* and Peter Wehner's in *Commentary*—in particular mark an advance. They appear in magazines that until now have been strongholds of what might be called borderless enthusiasm. Yet both praise the book and concede that mass immigration is not an unalloyed good. Both also advance serious reservations about Krikorian's argument.

Skerry is a scholar well versed in the immigration controversy. More optimistic than Krikorian about whether today's immigrants will assimilate (and how quickly), he nonetheless accepts that they will impose heavy costs in government spending. He even wonders why Krikorian is proposing only a modest cut to 400,000 entries annually. Given Krikorian's gloomy analysis, he asks, why isn't he proposing a lower annual total? (Let me answer for Krikorian: Fewer immigrants equal faster assimilation, which equals the alleviation of all the negative effects. The level Krikorian proposes would probably be adequate to achieve this result. This is, of course, not an exact science, and the policy would remain open to correction.)

Wehner is somewhat less favorable to Krikorian but he is also less familiar with the controversy. So he devotes much of his argument to a comparison between Krikorian and a pro-immigration tract, Jason Riley's *Let Them In: The Case for Open Borders*. Most of the time he finds himself unable to decide which of them is right (though he hints that Krikorian is the more scrupulous). His readers are less likely to be puzzled. The first clash he cites is over whether immigration hurts the job prospects of low-paid Americans. Wehner outlines Krikorian's argument, which quotes the economist George Borjas, that

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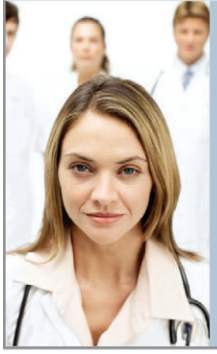

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immigration hurts the low-paid and then cites Riley, quoting the economist Giovanni Peri, saying that a California study showed the opposite effect. Earlier this year, however, Borjas published a paper showing that Peri had mistakenly treated juniors and seniors still in high school as "dropouts." When this was corrected, the favorable impact of immigration on job prospects disappeared and its opposite reappeared.

Similarly, Riley's reply to Krikorian's anxiety about the splintering of America's common culture (as quoted by Wehner) is: "Keep the immigrants. Deport the Columbia faculty." Well, it might be a joke except that it strongly resembles an earlier policy of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page—"Immigration Sí, Welfare No." That earlier idea evaporated at the first touch of political reality when the Republican Congress abandoned its attempt to restrict transfer payments to legal immigrants following the immigrants' protests on Capitol Hill. Both ideas illustrate how libertarian utopianism on immigration actually encourages statism by increasing the constituencies for it.

Still, Wehner more or less declares the Krikorian–Riley debate a draw. He then hands the cup to Riley, suggesting that his own (and Yuval Levin's) social calculations support Riley's optimism about mass immigration. Between 1995 and 2004, for instance, a vast number of social indicators from teen pregnancy to divorce improved despite the mass immigration of those years. True enough (though some indicators worsened). Yet during an earlier phase of mass immigration, say 1966 to 1985, many of those same social indicators got worse.

How so? Well, in each period, a lot else happened—OPEC, stagflation, Jimmy Carter, and the "misery index" in the first, and the Cold War peace dividend, the Gingrich bull market, and the full effects of Reagan's economic deregulation in the second. Once the rule of *ceteris paribus* is applied, the most that Wehner can claim is that America can *survive* mass immigration. Scientific and economic progress can mask or compensate for its malign effects. But it is still better to *avoid* lower wages for the already low-paid; overcrowded emergency rooms; ethnically charged, divisive politics; culture wars over U.S. history; and other social ills, even if they have not proved terminal in the past.

So Skerry is more willing than Wehner to abandon immigration pieties—and over a wider field. In the final reel, however, both reviewers settle on the same justification: Americans as a people are somehow wedded to immigration as an element in their distinctive national character. Skerry argues this guardedly, Wehner passionately, with quotations from Lincoln and Reagan and reflections on identity.

This argument is highly questionable, still more so the evidence for it. Americans have restricted immigration for long decades of the nation's history. Lincoln was living at a time when—as all the modern restrictionists point out—immigration was economically helpful to the U.S. And Reagan told his diary that "it's high time we regained control of our borders" (on October 16, 1986) and "[Sen. Alan Simpson] had a great collection of fraudulent SS cards, drivers licenses, union cards, etc.—Oh, also phoney food stamps. How can we curb this kind of counterfeiting?" (on June 1, 1981).

But such prosaic facts inflict little damage on the almost religious enthusiasm for mass immigration that this justification reflects. It is an enthusiasm that explains the fierce but inarticulate support of the liberal and conservative elites for it. And against that cloudy enthusiasm, Mark Krikorian, despite the solid intellectual victories of his book, still struggles in vain. **NR**

THE CLOCKMAKER

Time should be heard as well as seen,
Says the clockmaker, carving a cuckoo bird.
My wife gives the sick child his medicine.
Who said children should be seen, not heard?

I work all night until my sight is blurred,
At this abandoned craft that now is mine
For all the comfort folly can afford.
Time should be heard as well as seen.

I can't imagine what life might have been
Without the babies crying, had I preferred
The cloister or the study at nineteen,
Thinks the clockmaker carving a cuckoo bird

In hours stolen from sleep, pleasure deferred
For the sake of this obsession, a daft machine
That never can refund the cost incurred.
My wife gives the sick child his medicine

Praying he'll sleep soundly and be fine
Tonight or tomorrow night, someday. The third
Time he cried out wrecked my whole design.
Who said children should be seen, not heard?

I dreamed he lay so peaceful that the Lord
Himself believed the stillness was divine
And would not wake him, although my absurd
Clocks froze and went silent for a sign:
Time should be heard.

—DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN

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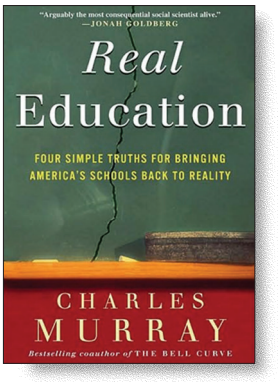
Old School



Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality, by Charles Murray (Crown Forum, 219 pp., $24.95)

ROBERT VERBRUGGEN

Charles Murray's *Real Education* weighs in at under 200 pages, not counting the notes—it's no doorstop like the libertarian icon's *The Bell Curve* or *Human Accomplishment*. Nonetheless, it's heavy on ideas, proposing dramatic policy upheavals from the university system down through elementary school. It is to be hoped that the book will do for education policy what Murray's 1984 treatise *Losing Ground* did for welfare reform; it's an important contribution.

Two fundamental distinctions underlie Murray's framework. When it comes to higher education, the distinction is between students who go to college for vocational training, and students who go to learn, either for learning's sake or to lay the foundation for post-graduate study. In K–12 education, the distinction is between learning facts and learning concepts.

When it comes to high-school graduates who want merely to launch careers, Murray contends that college is a waste of time. It's too easy to coast through without learning the tools of one's trade, and even so, plenty of people spend time and money going to school without graduating. Everyone involved would be much better off in a system where each vocational field agreed on a standardized test, much the way law has the bar exam today. Students would be free to study at local libraries, take online courses, hire private tutors, or go through traditional brick-and-mortar colleges—but regardless of how they prepared and how long it took, they would have to prove they had mastered the same material. This would level the playing field for students who can't afford college, and for low-cost schools that produce results.

Murray proposes something different for those students ("the gifted") who plan to enter high-end fields: Once most students have left to receive vocational training elsewhere, undergraduate colleges would return to the fundamentals of a liberal education. This means learning complex verbal expression, logic, philosophy, etc.

At first glance this looks fine—by giving the gifted a humanistic education, Murray would make sure our future elite is equipped to make decisions for our country. But some questions need to be asked: Why the disconnect between students wanting to work as hotel managers and those wanting to become CEOs? Why not streamline the path to business school, in the same way Murray proposes streamlining the path to the more ordinary vocations? We could encourage a surge in non-traditional ways to prepare for the GMAT exam, making it possible to skip undergraduate degrees entirely. The same goes for law: Why not eliminate the need for graduate school in that field, too, and open bar exams to anyone who wants to take them?

Murray seems to detect no disconnect between his plan and his own avowedly libertarian outlook—in fact, he seems most concerned with refuting the argument that educating the gifted in a special way "smacks of Plato's Guardians" or might be seen as "elitist." But it is undeniably collectivist to force adults to learn things they don't want or need to, for the common good.

Not to mention that the implementation would almost certainly not go according to Murray's plan. For example, on the question of what kinds of virtue colleges should teach, Murray offers an unrealistically narrow choice. Remember the waitress in the country-and-western bar in *The Blues Brothers*, the one who said the bar featured both kinds of music—country *and* western? Well, Murray envisions schools that teach both kinds of virtue—Confucian *and* Aristotelian. But the fact is, reasonable people could suggest other philosophies; and—to make matters worse—unreasonable people run colleges. Murray points out that Confucius and Aristotle reached many of the same conclusions, and that a life is well-lived under either system. But what about a life lived under post-modern, social-justice, sex-positive-feminist ethics?

Then there's the issue of how, given today's mess in lower education, students would even be prepared to undertake such study. This is where Murray emphasizes the teaching of facts in elementary, middle, and high schools: To participate in society, future doctors and future mechanics alike need to know basic details about literature, history, etc., and our schools are not teaching these. It may be fashionable to disdain memorization, but it's one of the few skills in which even dim students can excel.

He suggests schools use E. D. Hirsch's Core Knowledge curriculum. Fair enough (though Murray might be a little optimistic about how well students retain such knowledge over the years). Murray's proposal of a return to discipline—making sure that all disruptive students are removed from class, and sent to alternative schools if necessary—would be a welcome change as well, and would facilitate all this extra learning.

However, what's sure to be most controversial about *Real Education* is its assessment of the teaching of *concepts* in lower education. It goes like this: Things are pretty much fine as they are. By and large, the reason students score poorly on things like math and reading comprehension is that they are not smart enough to score better, no matter how well they are taught. After all, on standardized tests, when questions require even the slightest inferential leaps, significant numbers of students get them wrong. When a student can work through all the steps a problem requires, but cannot mentally process how the steps relate to one another, it's hard to blame the teacher. Thus, the demand of No Child Left Behind that every child be academically "proficient"

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by 2014 is nothing short of insane. (Unless, of course, states take advantage of the fact that they get to set the "proficiency" bar themselves, and make the tests easier.)

The obvious counterargument—one that Murray inexcusably misses the opportunity to rebut—is that other industrialized countries consistently outscore the United States on tests. If it's impossible to make students learn any better, how is it that Japan and Finland do just that? The undeniable, if unseemly, answer is that America's low average is the result of its racial diversity. In 2005, the University of Pennsylvania's Erling E. Boe and Sujie Shin separated U.S. scores by race, and found that American whites hold up perfectly well in international comparisons. One can argue for better education for blacks and Hispanics (even Murray admits that the worst inner-city schools are exceptions to his rule that everything's peachy), but the score gap in itself does not constitute evidence that the entire American educational system is rotting.

In arguing that improving schools won't much improve test scores, Murray draws heavily on the Coleman Report, a huge 1966 study done in accordance with the Civil Rights Act of two years earlier. It found, roughly speaking, that demography is destiny: "It is known that socioeconomic factors bear a strong relation to academic achievement. When these factors are statistically controlled . . . it appears that differences between schools account for only a small fraction of differences in pupil achievement."

This is a powerful argument, and educators do need to set more modest goals. But in statistics, there are always multiple ways to attack a problem, and it turns out that while there may be little difference between *entire schools* in terms of squeezing achievement out of students, there are differences between *individual teachers*. This is a fact Murray does not address, and it could hold the key to a bigger rise in test scores than he seems to think possible.

Ray Fisman, research director at the Columbia Business School's Social Enterprise Program, summarized the scholarship on teacher quality in a recent *Slate* article. While it's not possible to predict which education-school graduates will be the best teachers, doing so is easy once they've taught a few years: If a teacher raised students' test scores in the past, he'll likely do so again.

Fisman suggests that school districts, with the help of economists, keep statistical track of each teacher's effect on test scores. Then there should be three options: fire teachers who don't measure up, set up an apprenticeship program through which teachers prove themselves before receiving the lifetime tenure that is a union card, and/or mandate some sort of training to improve underperforming teachers. (Any of these steps, of course, would entail declaring war on the unions.)

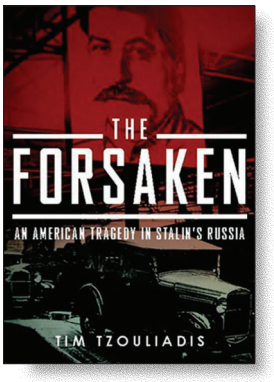
In *Real Education*, Murray has once again provided food for thought, backed with rigorous analysis and presented in lucid prose.

How much would such efforts help? The results wouldn't have to be drastic to be worthwhile. As Murray writes, a little bit of academic ability doesn't do much for an individual—the odds of two extra ACT points' getting someone into a given school are slim—but if the country's *average* rose by that same little bit, the ramifications would potentially be huge.

Back in *The Bell Curve*, he recalls, he and Richard Herrnstein extrapolated statistically that if every American's IQ rose just three points, the country would see "reductions of 25 percent in the poverty rate, 18 percent in welfare recipiency, 15 percent in nonmarital births, and 12 percent in low-weight births." Such calculations are speculative, to be sure, but if the numbers are even half-right, we shouldn't give up on improving children's ability to grasp key concepts.

In *Real Education*, Murray has once again provided food for thought, backed with rigorous analysis and presented in lucid prose, for the nation's policymakers. If the story of *Losing Ground* is any indication, twelve years from now, they might even listen. **NR**

In the Nightmare



The Forsaken: An American Tragedy in Stalin's Russia, by Tim Tzouliadis (Penguin, 448 pp., $29.95)

RONALD RADOSH

We know that history holds many surprises. One does not expect to learn more about the secret history of the Gulag than we already know from both Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* and Anne Applebaum's *Gulag: A History*. This feat, however, is exactly what the Greek-born British documentary filmmaker Tim Tzouliadis has accomplished, in a book that should be placed alongside the others as a must-read account of the horrors Joseph Stalin inflicted upon his victims.

What Tzouliadis offers is a dramatic account of the previously unknown story of the thousands of American citizens who, during the Depression, sought employment and a better future in the "worker's paradise" built by the Russian Bolsheviks after the 1917 revolution. All kinds of Americans joined the exodus. Some of them were ethnic American Communists or fellow-travelers who wanted to help build socialism. The majority, however, were average Americans who could not help but be tempted by the offers coming from Moscow: Skilled workers were

Mr. Radosh, senior adjunct fellow at the Hudson Institute, is co-author of *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*.

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promised paid passage, jobs at high pay, paid vacations, and free medical care. When the Soviet agency Amtorg advertised for help in American papers in 1931, they got over 100,000 applications for slightly over 10,000 advertised jobs. The flood of immigrants included not only steelworkers and auto-assembly-line workers (including Walter and Victor Reuther) but also teachers, clerical workers, dentists, and doctors.

Some were blacks, like the Communist leader Lovett Fort-Whiteman, fleeing the segregationist South for a land where color would be no barrier. But, once in the Soviet Union, Fort-Whiteman was disappointed to find that his fellow American migrants were thoroughly racist. For the crime of beating up a black worker, two white workers were deported by the Soviet authorities back to America. They were the lucky ones. Within a few years, Fort-Whiteman would be arrested and hauled to the Gulag, where he would be viciously beaten and soon killed. How could he have foreseen, the author asks, "that by being deported back to the United States for their assault, [the two white workers] would have their lives saved, while he, by staying on, would have his own condemned?"

Unlike political pilgrims—who visited Communist countries, took Potemkin tours, and then reported back to their countrymen the great accomplishments they had witnessed—the American migrants to the Soviet Union learned the bitter truth soon after their arrival. There they found not a worker's paradise, but near-starvation standards of living, lack of adequate or even slightly decent housing, and little to purchase with the meager funds they were actually paid. When they arrived in the Soviet Union, the Americans were asked to "temporarily" give up their passports. Realizing their mistake and seeking to return to the United States, they were told they were now Soviet citizens subject exclusively to Soviet law, and were not free to come home. Turning for help to the American embassy (after FDR's administration had recognized the Soviet Union in 1933), they were astonished to find that the personnel treated them, as one diplomat put it, as the "flotsam and jetsam" of America who deserved the fate handed them, and that their own government would not do anything to help them.

Stalin, of course, had his own reasons for not allowing the Americans to return. He could ill afford—so soon after the establishment of diplomatic relations with the U.S.—to have thousands of Americans returning who knew the truth about the revolution. Stalin knew, as Tzouliadis writes, that "every American emigrant carried with [him] the threat" to reveal that truth to the world. Most shocking, however, was the fact that as Americans joined the millions of Russians arrested in the middle of the night and sent to the Gulag, knowing embassy personnel continued to look the other way, under orders from the ambassador level on down. FDR's first ambassador, William Bullitt, had begun his tenure sympathetic to the Soviet experiment, but, seeing the truth, quickly soured. As he told the president in his last dispatch before departing, the Soviet leaders were determined "to produce world revolution and the 'liquidation'" and "mass murder" of all potential opponents. Bullitt had seen his Moscow friends suddenly disappear, and his aides had witnessed thousands forced into cattle cars and sent off to Siberia.

Bullitt's replacement was Stalin's dream candidate: the naïve, pro-Soviet diplomat Joseph Davies. When a campaign began in the U.S. to intervene on behalf of Ruth Rubens, an American woman who had disappeared in Moscow and was being held in Butyrskaya Prison, the embassy staff was so distraught about Davies's inaction that they contemplated mass resignation. When Davies, who was out of the country, returned to Moscow, he apologized to the Soviet ambassador to the U.S.—and to FDR—for his staff's attempts to help her.

When Davies's wife, Marjorie Merriweather Post, was woken up at night by gun blasts across the street as NKVD agents murdered prisoners, her husband would explain that she was hearing the sound of drilling for Stalin's new Moscow metro. Other victims were dragged off by the NKVD in the new Soviet-built Ford Model A cars in which they brought their prey to the secret police's infamous Lubyanka Prison. "In Russia," the author writes, "the Americans were carried away in the very cars they had left Detroit to build." Henry Ford had signed his contract with the Soviets in Dearborn, providing the NKVD's entire fleet. Davies commented to the media: "The Soviet Union is doing wonderful things. The leaders of the government are an extremely capable, serious, hardworking, and powerful group of men and women."

Davies was notorious, of course, as the man who validated Stalin's great purge trial in 1936 as fair, and proclaimed the witnesses' forced confessions to be genuine and uncoerced. Roosevelt, intent upon welcoming the Soviets into a new alliance of friendship, preferred not to challenge his observations.

The long list of apologists for Stalin's terror—who denied its very existence—included the Asian scholar Owen Lattimore, Vice President Henry A. Wallace, the Communist baritone Paul Robeson, and the *New York Times* Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist Walter Duranty. All of them did their part to hide the truth and paint a false picture of a benign Stalin who was America's best friend. Tzouliadis devastatingly portrays the harm they did, and their moral culpability in the crimes of Stalinism.

America's wartime policy did more than just prettify Stalin. Lend-Lease aid was used to supply and repair the Liberty ships sent to the Soviet Union for wartime use, supposedly for the war against the Nazis. Half of them, we learn, were actually sent to Soviet Far East ports, such as Magadan, where they were used to send new slave

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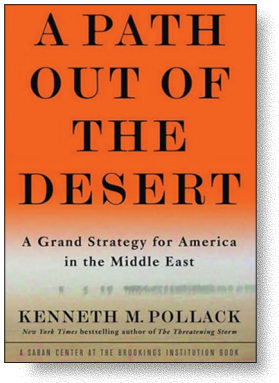
laborers to the arctic Kolyma camp. "NKVD steamers," Tzouliadis writes, "were reconditioned at the expense of the American taxpayer, before their quick return to service as the 'death ships of the Sea of Okhotsk.'" One ship was overhauled at the cost of half a million dollars in 1942, after a fire caused it to sink. American workers opened the holds to find evidence that hundreds of prisoners had been locked inside. Yet the ship was returned to Vladivostok, where more prisoners were picked up to be sent to the Kolyma prison camp. "Without the NKVD fleet," Tzouliadis notes, "the operations within Kolyma would have been impossible to sustain. The ships were an essential link in the mechanism, required to replace the prisoners who had died, and to expand still further the network of concentration camps. It was as if the Reichsministry had arranged to have its railway engines repaired in Philadelphia and then shipped back . . . to recommence their journey to Auschwitz."

Reviewing *The Gulag Archipelago* in *The New Yorker* in 1974, George Steiner wrote that "to infer that the Soviet terror is as hideous as Hitlerism is not only a brutal oversimplification but a moral indecency," revealing with those words the vast blind spot of Western Left intellectuals. Despite Solzhenitsyn, that blind spot continues. As Tzouliadis notes, it has enabled the story of what happened to the Americans who sought work in Soviet Russia to disappear down the memory hole. And since so many continue to believe that the Soviet repression was hardly comparable to that of the Nazis, many will deny that in the Soviet Union, as the author concludes, its defining story "was the murder of millions of innocent citizens by the state." Unlike Germany, the former Soviet Union never had any war-crimes tribunals to make these horrors known to its own public, nor any "truth and reconciliation" commissions in which the still-living torturers came forth to testify. And there was never any photographic evidence available to help visualize the accounts written by the few survivors.

Tim Tzouliadis has done a great service by making the truth known. His book deserves the widest circulation and readership. **NR**

The Sandstorm


A PATH OUT OF THE DESERT
A Grand Strategy for America in the Middle East
KENNETH M. POLLACK
New York Times bestselling author of The Threatening Storm
A SABAN CENTER AT THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION BOOK

A Path Out of the Desert: A Grand Strategy for America in the Middle East, by Kenneth M. Pollack (Random House, 592 pp., $30)

DAVID PRYCE-JONES

Who could be cheerful about the Middle East? In that epicenter of instability, the news is almost exclusively about war and civil war, repression and injustice. If those responsible for the frightfulness were a danger only to themselves, the realist and the cynic might conclude that outsiders had better let them do their worst regardless. But as the people and their countries are going down, they can take everyone else with them. Islamist terror is a means to that end, and nobody knows how or when it might be stopped. Worse, Iran is a state actively promoting Islamist terror against the United States and, more generally, everything the West stands for. Many observers believe that Iran will soon acquire a nuclear weapon, at which point the Middle East danger zone will be well and truly globalized.

The rest of the world has to do what it can for the Middle East. Self-interest coincides with human solidarity. The indispensable first step is to analyze the root cause of the violence that perpetuates itself so damagingly. This much is clear: For historic and religious reasons, the regimes of the Muslim Middle East are all absolute, even in Iran and Turkey, where elements of pluralism do exist. In the absence of genuinely representative parliaments and political parties, loyal opposition, and the rule of law, the way is open for one-man rule. The ambitious struggle for power with no holds barred, and power itself becomes a matter of personality. Some Middle East power-holders are more decent than others, but basically all depend upon their military and secret-police apparatus. Nothing except success distinguishes the habitual criminality of rulers like Saddam Hussein or Yasser Arafat from the habitual criminality of failed seekers of power like Osama bin Laden and Moqtada al-Sadr. In the free-for-all struggle for supremacy in the absolute order, the decisive factors are the possession of more force than anyone else, and the will to use it.

Kenneth M. Pollack is very well aware of the reasons not to be cheerful about the Middle East, and he is not wrong. A former CIA analyst and member of the Clinton administration, he is now at the Brookings Institution, and a think-tank specialist par excellence. Evidently studious, he is strong on book-learning, filling over 70 pages of footnotes mostly referring to other think-tank specialists, and often showering as many as three or four parentheticals on a page just to make maddeningly sure of every nuance and qualification.

The premise of *A Path Out of the Desert* is that the United States, whether it likes it or not, has to take responsibility for the Middle East, and this means devising a grand strategy that will eliminate the regional violence and whatever causes it. The U.S. cannot let the Middle East take care of itself, because the U.S. has one vital and enduring interest there, namely securing the supply of oil, not so much for itself as for other consumers. Failure in this respect risks the collapse of the world's economic order. Some like to think that support for Israel, the sole, beleaguered democracy in the region, is also a major interest, but for Pollack this is altogether secondary, more a matter of sentiment and morality than anything else. To a limited extent, Israel serves American purposes in the region, nothing much would be gained by dropping it, and anyhow it has proved possible to have good relations with Arabs *and* Israel over a long period.

Insistently and repetitively, Pollack

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attributes the violence to the despair, frustration, and anger that, according to him, motivate Arabs and Muslims, and lead them to place the blame for their plight more on the U.S. than on their own absolute rulers. Here he is only partly right, seemingly influenced more by his hours in the library than by firsthand experience. To be sure, Arabs and Muslims are in the main poor, ill-educated, and gripped by custom that derives from Islam and their culture. Fully aware of these handicaps, they are nevertheless not the simmering anti-American proto-revolutionaries that Pollack so greatly fears. Some do resent American support for rulers such as the Saudi monarch or Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, but many even of these are simultaneously dreaming of emigrating to the United States.

The man in the street has grown up in these circumstances. He knows how to survive, how to exploit the social safety net of family and tribe and sect. He knows whom to bribe, knows he should be careful to stay out of politics, knows he should propitiate those above while treading on those below—the whole time saying to himself the timeless truth underlying the Arab vision of the human comedy, "This too will pass."

Whether people so inured over centuries to doing things their own way can ever be changed by outsiders, however well-meaning, is open to question. Never mind skepticism, never mind hubris, Pollack believes in the ultimate remodeling of the entire Arab and Muslim order on the lines of liberal social democracy. Of course it would be nice to have rulers legitimized by popular consent, and the establishment of civil rights, free speech, the open market, and all such indispensable attributes of the modernity Arabs and Muslims do not enjoy. The means Pollack wants to employ toward these desirable ends are rather simple: Friends, even those in the military, have to receive lots of subsidies, grants, and aid in order to do what is required of them, and enemies must be deprived of everything except negotiations, at which they will have to be convinced of the error of their ways. This may all take a long time. American policymakers should be flexible and patient—two favorite Pollack words.

Another favorite Pollack word is "unfortunately," usually placed at the opening of a sentence describing the reality he intends to alter, and the adverb comes in handy when considering what this grand strategy of democratization through money and negotiation would be like in practice. Friends, especially in the military, would continue pocketing whatever they could, and say they must have still more to be effective. The Iranians are already demonstrating their mastery of negotiations. The Saudis do not need any more money, and their idea of negotiating is to give orders—nobody can imagine how their country can ever be anything but a total obstacle to reform and democracy, and Pollack doesn't even try to do so. He has no advice about how tribes are to be institutionalized, how minorities are to be protected, or how to achieve mutual citizenship for Sunnis and Shiites after 14 centuries of hostility. He much prefers the euphemistic word "authoritarian" to hard talk about absolutism. Unfortunately indeed, no absolute ruler with a career behind him of seizing and holding power is going to give it up voluntarily for the sake of better or fairer governance of the people. There is only a single glancing reference here to the *mukhabarat*, the all-controlling secret-police apparatus of these regimes in whose hands Pollack's grand strategy would very soon come to rest.

In a previous and more consequential book, *The Threatening Storm*, Pollack laid out the case for the invasion of Iraq only a few months before it actually occurred in 2003. Saddam Hussein, he then maintained, was an abominable tyrant, and since Iraqis could not overthrow him, others had to do the job for them. And so it happened. Now for what seem essentially party-political motives, Pollack reverses himself and repeatedly trashes the invasion of Iraq as a fiasco, a disaster, a catastrophe, brought about by the endless succession of mistakes made by President Bush. Strangely, though, he never specifies the nature of the fiasco, the disaster, and the catastrophe, or what these purported mistakes might be—we are to take it on his say-so.

Saddam Hussein was the archetype of a Muslim absolute ruler, whose will was supreme, as though he represented the nation. In challenging him, the U.S. was abandoning Western codes of pressuring enemies through money and negotiation, and instead accepting the code of the Arab and Muslim order that the use of force is decisive. The only potential fiasco or catastrophe would have been the military defeat of the United States. As it proved, the U.S. demonstrated force so superior that it has been able to impose its will, which involves not the perpetuation of absolutism under some other one-man ruler—as would have been the case in the old Arab and Muslim order—but democratization. Those who find the imposition of democracy through the force of arms too paradoxical to be welcomed have to explain how else Saddam's sort of absolute rule is ever to be broken.

Now it is conceivable that Iraqis will prove incapable of running a democracy, but there is no a priori reason to think so, especially at a moment when Iraq at last seems to be offering grounds for cheerfulness. That country is a constitutional republic with a representative parliament and political parties, free speech, and a market economy. Pollack's grand strategy would extend the bad old ways of the Middle East into the indefinite future. President Bush has instead shown that there is a viable alternative, and it offers a shortcut to democratization. **NR**

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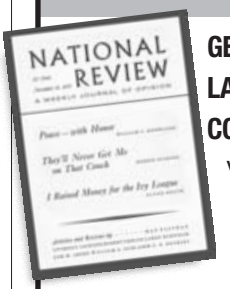

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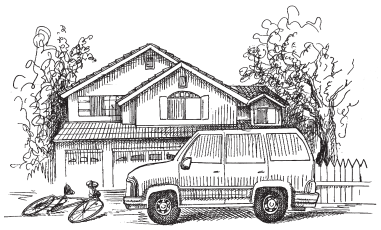
■ THE STRAGGLER ■

Over the Boardwalk



JOHN DERBYSHIRE

SIXTY-THREE . . . single . . . 62 . . . single . . . 61 . . . triple . . . Ching! Yes! Fifteen credits! So . . . 76 . . . single . . . 75 . . . single . . .

That is your columnist playing Triple Cherry. Let me back up a little for some scene-setting.

My daughter was away in England, my wife and son both at loose ends. I decided to take them with me to Atlantic City, where I had a couple of hours' worth of minor business to transact. We made a two-day trip of it. There is beach, after all, and boardwalk, and casinos, and the place is only a three-hour drive from Straggler Hall. So off we went.

Results were mixed. The beach was crowded, the sea murky and much colder than it had any right to be in August. I had forgotten, too, what a slum the city mostly is. Wander a couple of hundred yards away from the casino area and you are among narrow, ill-kept houses from whose yards obese people stare at you with dull hostility, apparently having nothing better to do on a weekday afternoon. (Although I should say that when I posted some remarks to this effect online, I got indignant e-mails from Atlantic Citizens telling me that the city has plenty of pleasant neighborhoods populated by people who work, diet, and look after their houses. No doubt I just wandered in the wrong direction.)

On the other hand, my son was fascinated by the pier. ("A disappointed bridge"—James Joyce.) He roamed happily among the sideshows, and begged, successfully, to be shot up in the air by the bungee-cord contraption. After due cautions about talking to strangers and counting his change, we left him there and headed for a casino. Neither of us is a gambler in any but the most occasional sense, but this was Atlantic City, home to 43,096 slot machines, according to the World Casino Directory.

What an astonishing sight these places are! The slot machines appear, when seen en masse, to be uniform—hundreds of replicas, as in some vision out of oriental mysticism—like the massed ranks of carved, gilded Buddha figures in a Burmese temple, or the angels imagined by a Taoist poet:

> Ah! Clothed in rainbows, riding on winds,
> Sallies out the host of heaven!
> With tigers for musicians, phoenix as charioteers—
> Oh, numberless are their ranks!
> My spirit cowers, my soul trembles!

Or like the buried army of the first Chinese emperor, for that matter; though in fact each of those soldier-statues is slightly different from every other. The slots hall at Trump Taj Mahal does not attain that level of individuality, but there are different types of machine. My own choice is the Triple Cherry. The bet on Triple Cherry—the unit of credit—is a quarter, which seems to me the right amount. The number of cylinders is three, which seems to me the right number. And there is some modest optional variation in play: You may bet one credit, or three (with, of course, triple rewards). There is also, in a gesture to tradition that should gladden the heart of any conservative, a lever you can pull in lieu of pressing the button.

Naturally I have a system. I feed a $20 bill into the slot, causing 80 to appear on the credits display. I then proceed according to the following rule: If the number in the display is prime, I bet three credits; otherwise, only one. This gives an agreeable length of playing time, together with the mild mental exercise of spotting primes up to 200 or so. A wise player would of course cash in his winnings when his bonus credits have piled up to that point. Amateur gamblers are rarely wise, though. There is always the flickering hope of that jackpot payout—a thousand dollars on Triple Cherry.

Mrs. Straggler's system must be inferior to mine. We begin with equal stakes, but she always exhausts hers first. Perhaps she is just a more reckless player. Gambling is, after all, proverbially the national vice of the Chinese. Our very first excursion to this city, back in the 1980s, was on the free bus from New York's Chinatown. The bus was actually better than free: They used to hand out $20 casino coupons as you disembarked.

And the bus was for small fry. Back then my wife worked for a Chinatown jeweler who took only cash for his wares, stuffing the money bills into a back-office safe until the safe's door would no longer close. (A Chinatown merchant would think himself a fool if he paid more than nominal tax on his revenues.) At that point the jeweler would pack the boodle into a suitcase and phone a certain number. A limousine would arrive to take him and his wife to their suite at one of the Atlantic City casino hotels. Limo and suite were of course gratis. Our merchant was, as they say in casino-land, "comped up to the eyeballs."

Possibly this national trait is related somehow to the fact, which I was told by a social-worker friend, and which the relevant websites seem to confirm, that while most twelve-step addiction cures call on a higher power for assistance, Gamblers Anonymous makes a point of welcoming atheists and agnostics. "Which is what most gambling addicts are," explained my friend. Have not the Chinese been called the world's least religious people, and its most superstitious? That long string of lucky 8s in the date and time of the Olympics opening ceremony . . . Well, I am only speculating.

As I drive us home along the Garden State Parkway, the resourceful Mrs. Straggler produces fresh fruit that she purchased and washed earlier in the day. She cuts up a peach and feeds the pieces to me as I drive. "Can't cut up pear for you, sorry." In Chinese, "divide a pear" sounds just like the verb "to separate," so that for a wife to cut up a pear for her husband would be unlucky. With so much attention to what is and is not lucky (I tease), why didn't she do better on the slots? She ripostes with her language's precise equivalent of "Man proposes, heaven disposes." Some insights are universal. **NR**

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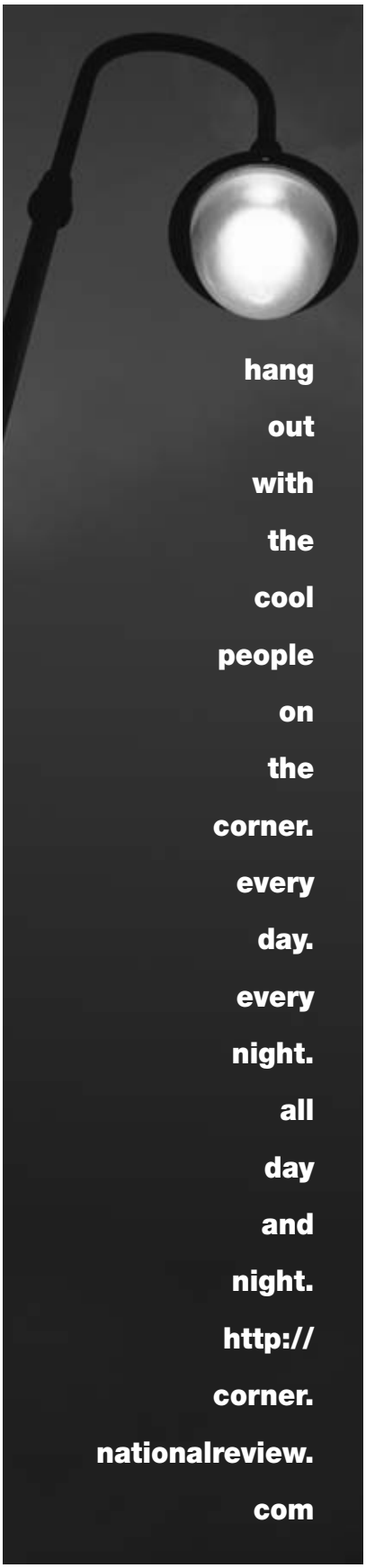

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but enough about you

CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

A Thousand Points of Spite

It's hard to say what Campaign 2008 will be remembered for, assuming it ever *ends*. Lord knows it can certainly claim a number of firsts, starting with, let's see, the nomination of Sarah Palin and ending with . . . the nomination of Sarah Palin. Anyone who can drive MoveOn.org and Bill Maher to such spasms of fury is okay in my book. Or as the late Dudley Moore would have said, "I say, that's a bit of all right."

But probably Campaign 2008 will go down as the one in which the bloggers shunted aside the MSM. (That's "mainstream media" for those of you who have been sensibly going along living your lives). What does this portend for the republic? The bloggers, with their laptops and cell-phone cameras, seem to share one trait: They're rather *angry*. We have gone from a thousand points of light to a thousand points of spite. Thus do we progress.

When I was growing up back during the Pre-Cambrian Era—the world was more, I don't know, organized? There was Russia (bad) and the U.S. (good) and China (very bad, and Red), though no one paid much attention to it until Henry Kissinger went in 1972 to have tea with Chairman Mao. Media-wise there were Walter Cronkite, David Brinkley (not forgetting Chet Huntley: "Good night, David"; "Good night, Chet"), and whatsisname, Howard K. Smith, on that other upstart network called . . . what was it? . . . ABC. Somewhere along the line something called "Public TV" started—wow, *four* channels!—which required adding funny, round antennas to the rabbit ears on the back of your television. Dad would twist it while Mom issued directions: "No, the other way . . . that's it . . . no, you lost it . . ." Until finally a grainy image appeared of a man sitting in a chair, with bags under his eyes, looking disappointed. "That looks like David Susskind," Mom would say. Mom and Dad would peer at the screen. Dad would wiggle the antennas some more. "I think it *is* David Susskind," he'd say. "Well," Mom would say, "I certainly don't want to watch *him*."

That was media in those happy, bygone days, when the afternoon paper arrived with a thump on the porch, a sound often followed by the yelps of the newspaper boy as our poodle sank his fangs into the lad's thigh. If there was news—that is, real news, the kind that made you ask the grown-ups, "So, does this mean we're, like, at *war* with the Russians?"—the *Jackie Gleason Show* or Mitch Miller would disappear from the screen, replaced by an ominously silent card that read: "SPECIAL BULLETIN." Followed by a lugubrious voice saying, "We interrupt this program for a special announcement." Followed by Walter Cronkite, God's own press secretary.

Everyone is Walter Cronkite.

In the house where I grew up, there were always newspaper types. If something really big was brewing, they'd say, in reverent tones, "The AP is moving a story . . ." It sounded so dramatic, that "moving." I imagined a story literally *moving* through the wires, and knew that when it came out, it would be a doozie.

What prompts me to this *Weltschmerz* is this buzzkill "viral" (what a perfect word for it) letter that someone just sent me—the one written by the woman (you're not going to get any free publicity in my column, Toots) in Wasilla, Alaska, on the theme of "If you knew Sarah like *I* knew Sarah." For a moment I thought I was in receipt of an interesting, fresh bit of intelligence; then I Googled the woman's name and found about 3 trillion hits. I seem to be the last person on earth to have read her viral letter, which I didn't want in the first place.

I don't know. Maybe it's true what she says in the letter, that our beautiful—indeed, seemingly perfect—Sarah Palin is actually a fraud: a big-spending hypocrite who spent only a week in the PTA and who tried to fire the town librarian for not censoring books. But she's still a bit of all right in my book.

A friend just showed me a website that seems to consist entirely of captured satellite feed of right-wing TV and radio commentators throwing Genghis Khan–quality hissy fits during commercial breaks because the TelePrompTer isn't working. The website is run by someone (sorry, pal, no free publicity for you, either) who, when he isn't rummaging through satellite garbage, can be heard regularly denouncing the U.S. government for spying and phone tapping. But we live in the Age of Gotcha. Deal with it.

A few days into working as a speechwriter for the vice president, I noticed that whenever we went in a motorcade, a TV cameraman accompanied us, filming the entire time through the open roof of the last car. Watching a vice-presidential motorcade progress through traffic intersections is, drama-wise, about as exciting as, say, watching a speech by Senate majority leader Harry Reid. Inasmuch as my (beloved) Mr. Bush hardly ever got any coverage, I naïvely inquired, Why the camera? I was told, "It's the Death Cam. In case someone shoots him."

Everyone has a cam now. Everyone is Walter Cronkite. And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, blogs towards Bethlehem to be born? **NR**

Mr. Buckley can be reached at christobuckley@yahoo.com.

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